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A Study from Life

London: John & W. G. Landon & Paris

FAMILY SECRETS,

OR

Hints to those who would make

HOME HAPPY.

By M^{rs} Ellis.

VOL. III.



T. Allen.

F. F. Walker.

The Morning Prayer.

FAMILY SECRETS

OR

HINTS TO THOSE

WHO WOULD MAKE HOME HAPPY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“THE WOMEN OF ENGLAND.”

VOL III.

FISHER, SON, & CO.

NEWGATE STREET, LONDON; RUE ST. HONORÉ, PARIS.

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FAMILY SECRETS.

CHAP. I.

THE YOUNG SCULPTOR.

“My good fellow,” said a young man, who had the appearance of being a recent traveller, “can you tell me which is the house of Steinberg the sculptor?”

“That there,” replied a porter, pointing over the way towards an irregular range of buildings which formed a line of tenements along one of the great roads leading in and out of London.

“That there?” muttered the traveller to himself, as as he stepped back a few paces; and a feeling of chagrin was depicted in his countenance, as he looked again at the premises with a scrutinizing eye—“I thought,” he continued, in the same under-tone, “that my father’s friend had been more eminent in his profession than this establishment would warrant me to suppose.” He rang the bell at the outer gate, however, in

a manly and determined manner, and was soon ushered into a small apartment or studio, in which Steinberg, the sculptor, was accustomed to receive those who wished to communicate with him on affairs of business. This apartment belonged not to the dwelling-house, though it communicated with it, but looked directly into a yard, where some half dozen workmen plied their busy tools, and where blocks of marble, and heaps of plaster, with other disjointed fragments of stone, ancient and modern, rough and smooth, lay in apparently confused masses, from which the hand of a Venus, or the forehead of an Apollo, with various other portions of the material sublime and beautiful of past ages, might be detected by the curious and observant eye.

In the small apartment above described, scarcely deserving a higher designation than that of workshop, sat the sculptor himself, whose appearance, to a casual observer, was as if his nature had assimilated itself to the material on which he worked—so cold and dry, and apparently unchangeable, was the general aspect of his face and figure. Still the outline of his countenance was fine, and when the velvet cap he usually wore was removed, and his hair fell in natural waves over his noble brow and temples, there was a sort of Roman dignity about the man, of which every one appeared to be sensible who approached him, and especially those who might by any mischance have advanced too near. The figure of Steinberg, too, was majestic and commanding; and not even the loose grey coat, in which he was usually enveloped, could conceal the promptness and facility of his movements. This, however, was discovered by a second glance; the first, as we have said before, perceived only the dry cold man of marble carvings; and before him, in this

character, and in his most stoical mood and attitude, the young traveller presented himself.

"My father," said the young man, attempting for the second time to tell his story—

"Your name, if you please, sir, in the first instance," asked Steinberg very coldly—and then the youth remembered that although his handsome form and lineaments might be well known in the city of his birth, it was highly important that they should have some Christian cognomen in a land of strangers.

"Louis Montreville," replied the youth.

"Montreville!" exclaimed the sculptor, holding out his hand, and looking at him with so piercing an expression that the stranger involuntarily shrunk back—"Ah! I see it all," he continued; "you are indeed the son of my old friend, and I must have been blind indeed not at the first moment of our meeting to have recognized the object of so much solicitude and affection. I have a letter from your poor mother, received, I think, two months ago, in which she expresses her hope that you would very soon be with us—I trust nothing in connection with her feeble state of health detained you longer than she anticipated."

"Oh no," replied the youth gaily, "I left my mother at the time she expected, but having for the first time in my life felt perfectly at liberty to dispose of myself as I thought best, it was but natural that I should wish to see something of the new world upon which I was entering, before I resigned that liberty again."

"It was natural," said Steinberg—but he made this concession with a contracted brow and lips compressed, as if a sudden suspicion had flashed across his mind

that the youth was not all his fond mother had described him, or, in other words, that he was not unlikely to give some trouble to those who had the care of him; and this peculiar look had then, and ever afterwards, something of the same effect upon the impetuous feelings of the young traveller, which cold water, dashed into the face, has upon a passionate and rebellious child: it was calculated to check, but not to subdue.

"I don't like this old fellow at all—I shall never make anything of him," was the modest remark which the young traveller made to himself, on returning to his hotel, to dress for the family-dinner to which Steinberg had invited him; and had not repeated applications to his mirror, which of all his friends was most undeviating in its flattery, raised the complacency of the self-admirer to its ordinary level, it is more than probable some means would have been invented for obtaining at least a temporary reprieve from further intercourse with so uncongenial a companion as the sculptor.

Louis Montreville, however, was seldom out of humour for more than the space of five minutes; for even if a reaccession of self-satisfaction did not restore his wonted complacency, the cause of his disquietude, whatever it might be, was apt to vanish into air, with the painful sensations it had excited, on the first presentation of any one of those numberless objects of excitement and interest which he was in the habit of finding in the busy world around him. And now to turn away from the gay city, from its parks, its crowded streets, its places of amusement, to dine, at an early hour, and spend the day in that "dry sand-hole," as he contemptuously called the establishment of his father's friend, was to the young

traveller so signal an act of self-denial, that he would fain have claimed some peculiar privilege or indulgence as his just reward.

“ I wonder whether there are any woman-kind about him ? ” said Louis, again returning to the mirror—“ Ah, yes ; I am sure my mother said something about a daughter ; but with that German-look, that grey complexion, and those dead eyes, one might as well sport one’s good looks before a marble slab, as before a woman constituted after the fashion of old Steinberg. Still the girl, if there be one, must have had a mother ; and as people are said to affect their opposites, it is more than probable I shall see some merry little Dutch-broom girl seated at the head of her father’s table.”

With this pleasing idea, Louis gave another glance, and then another, and then the last, at the tall and spirited figure, which in his native city had been considered unrivalled in its symmetry and grace. Complexion he could not boast ; for the suns of a warmer clime had given a sallow hue to a cheek and forehead whose outline was almost perfect, and over which there curled, in wild and glossy wreaths, a mass of hair, whose blackness truly mocked the raven’s wing. His eyes, too—but of these it is too early to speak—suffice it, that they often flashed upon the beholder with such a quick and startling brilliance, that all his other features—the noble curve of his nose, and the beauty of his classic mouth—were overlooked or forgotten.

Such, then, was the youth, dressed in a suit of handsome mourning, who presented himself again at the door of Steinberg the sculptor ; and this time he was ushered into the dwelling-house, and shown upstairs into a long room or gallery, lighted only from the ceiling, where

specimens of art, both ancient and modern, mutilated and entire, were arranged on every hand with the most scrupulous regard to order as well as taste.

It was one of the redeeming points of Louis Montreville's character, that he was an enthusiastic lover of the fine arts; and although this peculiar turn of mind is far from meriting the respect due to moral excellence, it proved, in his case, as it had done in many others, a means of preservation from vulgar folly, as well as from association with the ignorant and degraded. He was a genius, too, as might easily be understood from the lighting up of his countenance, from the fire of his wild eyes, and from the depth and tone of his expressions, whenever any subject was discussed which came within the sphere of his favourite range of thought and feeling.

The impression made upon the mind of the elder artist by the first appearance of his young friend had been most unfavourable. He had thought him vain, presumptuous, and consequently shallow; yet, as the son of a friend recently deceased, he had determined to show him every kindness which the situation of a widowed mother, left with the care of an only son, demanded of her husband's early associate, school-companion, and college friend. True genius, however, is always humble; and however confident and self-satisfied Louis Montreville might appear on ordinary subjects, no sooner was the theme of his deeper thoughts, the passion of his inner soul, made manifest, than his whole character appeared to be transformed.

Under this metamorphosis he now followed his instructor from one end of the gallery to the other, listening, with the respectfulness and docility of a child, to all that might fall from the lips of one whom he regarded as having

advanced far in a career of glory, on which he was himself just panting to set out.

Steinberg, in his turn, looked again and again at his guest.—Was it possible he could be the same?—that grave and earnest look—that reverential tone—that thrill of feeling, visibly vibrating through every nerve—whence came they?—Yes, true it is, that real genius is lowly and humble, even in its own distinguished walk; and natural and reasonable it is that it should be so, since what it executes must ever fall so unmeasurably short of what it conceives. The materials with which it works, too—the dust and the clay, the meanest elements of nature—these are the clogs which hang upon the artist, and keep him down to a gross and tangible world, when he would fain soar into an existence in which form, and colour, and proportion are blended into one flood of beauty, where his soul would bathe for ever. No, it would not be possible for true genius to vaunt itself in its attainments, or to glory in its own success, in a world like ours, where it catches but faint glimpses of those mighty revelations for which it perpetually thirsts and pines; where it walks—alas, how often!—in the degraded ways of senseless and sensual beings, and where it is one of its strongest convictions, that although most intensely capable of appreciating beauty of every kind, even that moral beauty which belongs to love, and purity, and peace, it is of itself unable either to merit or to purchase one thrill of affection, one touch of spiritual renovation, or one glimpse of light from that holiness which alone can be productive of real or lasting peace.

Such, then, is genius; and these are amongst the causes why, if real, it never can vaunt itself or be puffed up, even by the applause of an admiring world.

"I have not introduced you to my daughter," said Steinberg to his guest on returning from the farther end of the gallery; and then, for the first time, Louis observed that a pale girl—almost as pale as the figures they were contemplating—had been seated on a low seat near the table at which her father worked.

Magdalen Steinberg rose when her father pronounced her name, and a slight colour passed over her cheek, to vanish in an instant, and leave it again as pale as marble. She was almost as motionless too; and the stranger looked again, to assure himself that she was a being endowed with life and motion; so perfectly classical were all the lineaments of her face and figure, so pure and still the character of her form and features.

Magdalen Steinberg, left early without a mother, had become her father's chief and almost only care—the only being in the whole world upon whom he lavished that affection of which his heart was full, without enjoying those natural outlets which friendship and society afford to other men. From an intense love of his art, as well as from the pain of many disappointments connected with the practice of that art as a profession, Steinberg had gradually learned to withdraw himself from all familiar association with a world most grossly, and in his opinion culpably, blind to the merits of an occupation which he estimated at something more than its real value. As the practice of his profession had become the sole business of his life, and his success as a sculptor the only object of his worldly ambition, so his wife and child had occupied all that was tender in his affections and warm in his heart; and when one of these idols was taken from him, he only watched the other with more intense solicitude, and poured upon the head of his beloved child those

floods of affection of which none would have believed him capable, who beheld only the cold exterior of the sculptor, when he mixed with a world, from which he studiously kept himself as separate as the circumstances of his life would permit.

The mother of Magdalen was an Italian, with whom her father became acquainted while pursuing his studies in Rome; and it was from this parent that she inherited her almost perfect beauty—perfect of its kind; for beauty must ever remain to be dependent upon the taste of the beholder, and such was that of Magdalen, that few persons of ordinary character and feeling, whose ideas had been formed amongst the common affairs of life, would have thought her beautiful. To the sculptor, however, she was a perfect model, and, as we have said before, so classical in the style of her form and features, that but for the dark folds of silken hair which lay upon her forehead, and a certain quickness of susceptibility in the expression of her large dark eyes, she might easily have been mistaken for one of the Grecian statues by which she was surrounded. Stillness too, that often-wanted, often-wished for excellence in woman's character, was to Magdalen so habitual, as to have become almost a part of her nature; and hence arose a yet greater resemblance to the antique and marble beauties who had constituted almost the only companions of her childhood and her youth.

There were few things on earth which the father of Magdalen disliked so much as the ordinary gossip of common female society. Could another woman like his lost wife have been found, he would have esteemed her friendship the greatest blessing his daughter could enjoy; but, believing as he did, that no such vestige of departed

excellence remained on earth, he studiously repelled every attempt from relative or neighbour, however kindly meant, to penetrate within the sacred precincts of his domestic circle. Thus Magdalen was, perhaps happily for herself, as ignorant of the value of a friend of her own sex, as she was unconscious of such a want; and though her young heart yearned perpetually for something, she knew not what, she learned to be still, and even satisfied, so long as her father loved her, and was pleased with what she said and did. Her own words were few, almost too few to offend, even had they been less sweet and well selected than they were. Her father was in the habit of employing her soft and musical voice in reading aloud to him from the best poets of different countries, during his hours of labour; for while his hands were busily employed, and one train of thought necessarily engaged in what they were about, he was accustomed to enjoy, what he described as an under-current of reflection flowing on like music to his soul; and never was this music so soothing, or so sweet, as when produced by the soft tones of his daughter's voice.

In this dreamy and monotonous way, then, Magdalen had spent her time; and while she sat at her father's feet with her head bent down, and her eyes fixed upon the book she read, with their long lashes falling in deep shadow on her pale cheek, where the rose of natural and healthy childhood had never bloomed, she looked like a mere automaton put into gentle motion by a set of machinery with which individual feeling had no concern. No sooner, however, did the thrill of some touching passage, or the warmth of some burning line, impart an additional glow to her complexion, than the true and sensitive woman might be read in every line and feature

of her face. But especially when she looked up, when her father addressed her kindly, or when surprised into sudden emotion by some startling truths; it was then that the soft and fawnlike eyes of Magdalen revealed what was in her nature, and in her heart.

Prepared as Louis had been for the merry Dutch-girl, with whom he had flattered himself he should be able to conduct a little flirtation unseen by the father, he was disappointed at first to find that the stillness and solemnity of the household were not likely to be broken in upon by any eccentric movements amongst the junior part of the family. Still there was too much of that beautiful ideal about the sculptor's daughter, upon which the young enthusiast, had dwelt in dreams by night and day, for him to wish her otherwise than as she was; though he did think, as he sat down to the dinner-table, that one daughter like Magdalen to sit in the studio, and another merry little girl to talk to at table, would have been a great improvement in the Steinberg family.

"Now sit down beside me," said the sculptor to his guest, after conducting him from the small and simple dining-room, a little earlier than the young man had expected, into an elegant apartment fitted up with the nicest adaptation to all the refinements of female taste. "Sit down beside me," he continued, "and tell me frankly all your wishes and all your plans; and in the mean time we will drink our coffee, and Magdalen will take her harp at the other end of the room, and beguile me, as she always does after dinner, of half my cares, and of all my sorrows, if I happen to have any."

"Had we not better give our attention to the music first?" said Louis, hesitating before he took his seat.

A frown from the father's brow gave instant warning

that this would not do ; and unwillingly the guest was compelled to seat himself beside his host at a very prudent distance from the scene of attraction.

This scene was no other than a large window at the end of a long room, into which the mellow light of an afternoon sun was stealing through a trellis-work of vine-leaves, and other plants, growing luxuriantly about the walls of a green-house adjoining ; and so green, and rich, and garden-like was the effect, which had thus ingeniously been given, that it would have been difficult to have associated anything within the apartment with the precincts of a vast and crowded city.

Near to this window, her figure thrown into strong relief by the light beyond, sat Magdalen Steinberg, tuning her harp, and turning over her music with the simplicity of one who has never been conscious of awakening a single emotion by the melody of her voice or lute.

“What is Miss Steinberg’s choice in music?” asked Louis, very naturally ; when another frown from the father indicated that the less Miss Steinberg was talked about the better.

“We will now enter upon your business, if you please,” said he.

Louis therefore, who was always rapid and impetuous in his thoughts and actions, did enter upon it in such a way, that his wishes were laid before his father’s friend without reserve, with the plans he had formed for the prosecution of his studies as a sculptor, before one sound beyond the ringing of certain separate chords had been heard from the other end of the room.

Perhaps one reason for this delay in the musician might be a very natural timidity in the presence of a stranger ; for although she had always been employed to

play and sing before her father, not to occupy, but to beguile him of his thoughts ; she was not quite sure that another person would be equally absorbed. At all events, she felt as if the eye of the stranger was upon her, and in this she was not mistaken.

“ You have no wish then,” said Steinberg, in the tone of a question, “ to become an inmate of my family, while prosecuting your studies ? ”

“ Why, no ; ” replied Louis, rather doubtfully, and glancing again at the lady and her harp, “ It might not be so agreeable to either party. I confess I like liberty. I believe I like amusement too ; and you seem quiet here, sir—very quiet.”

“ We are quiet,” observed Steinberg gravely, “ and I hope and trust we may always remain so. There could be no arrangement made for your becoming one of my household, in the least degree satisfactory to me, which did not tend to maintain and preserve this quiet. You must therefore clearly understand the terms on which alone you could dwell with me, not as a guest, but as a son. In the first place, you must never be out after ten at night.”

“ Oh ! sir, that is impossible ! ” exclaimed Louis.—
‘ No young man binds himself to such an hour as that.”

“ Very well, sir,” replied Steinberg, “ then we have nothing more to say on that subject. You will easily find lodgings elsewhere.”

At this moment Magdalen, being no longer able to find a chord untuned, began to play a bold and thrilling air, yet withal so light and free, that the thoughts of the listener involuntarily flew off to the camp of an armed host, to the tread of conquering soldiers, or to the rush

of mountain winds, when they bring the notes of the wild bugle on their blast.

"At ten, did you say?" inquired Louis, turning quickly to his host, when the music had ceased, "I will come home at nine every night if you please."

"Young man," said Steinberg, very sternly, "take care what you are about. Promise me nothing that you are not prepared to do. Let peace and concord at least be between you and me, for the sake of your parent who is gone, and for her who still lives. The world is all before you. Choose where you please, but do not, by your rashness and folly, bring trouble beneath my roof. I know nothing of your habits; they may, for aught I know, be correct, or they may be far otherwise; but one thing you ought to be fully assured of, that if not such as I approve, you never can be one with me, or mine."

"It would ill become me to boast," said Louis, "nor have I much cause. I suppose my past life has been much like that of other young men; but what could be so likely to make me better, as to be admitted into the bosom of a kind family, instead of being turned adrift amongst strangers in such a place as your great city?"

"You are right," replied Steinberg, "and be assured that nothing but consideration for your mother, and a strong conviction of the advantage it might be to you in a moral point of view, could induce me thus to risk the comfort of my family, by proposing such a plan."

"Pardon me," interrupted Louis, rather indignantly; "if you think the peace of your family likely to suffer by my presence, I can have no wish to inflict so great a punishment upon you, or yours. I withdraw my request, sir: I beg to withdraw it entirely. I feel that we should both be better satisfied to live separate."

Louis had scarcely uttered these words, accompanied with every indication of that swelling dignity which he thought himself so richly entitled to assume, than there rose from the other end of the apartment, the low soft tones of the sweetest voice it had ever been his happiness to hear. It was a melody of no common order. The words were Italian, and the accompaniment sad and touching in the extreme. Steinberg was evidently moved; and drawing his hand across his eyes, he murmured, with half-closed lips, as if speaking to himself, "That was her mother's song."

He said no more until the melody had ceased; but carefully shaded his face with his hand, as he leaned with his elbow on the table, as if unwilling that a stranger's eye should see how capable his feelings were of being shaken.

"Let me live with you;" said Louis, affectionately grasping his hand, as soon as the sound had ceased; "let me be to you as a son, and you shall be my father."

"Young man," said Steinberg looking earnestly in his face, "are you sincere?"

"I am," replied Louis, still holding his hand.

"Then be it so," replied the sculptor; "and when you know the value of the trust I repose in you, I think you will not be disposed to abuse it."

CHAP. II.

THE YOUNG SCULPTOR.

BUT a few weeks had passed, before Louis Montreville felt himself thoroughly at home in the Sculptor's family. It is true he did not like the stillness prevailing there, the early hours, the order, the dead calm, as he called it, in which the wings of his spirit were compelled to be folded, and inactive; he did not like the distance at which he was kept from the only being who fascinated, and charmed him to that spot; but ever as his temper and his feelings rebelled against the restraint to which he was under the necessity of submitting, the harp of Magdalen beguiled him of the restless thoughts that would have driven him forth into the world; or some smile or tear awakened by the poet whose pages she was reading, convinced him that in her shrouded heart there was a mine of feeling more rich and deep than he had ever found, or even imagined, to exist in woman.

But by what means was the barrier to be broken down which separated him from this unknown and impenetrable being? In other words, how was he to make her acquainted with his own excellences? how was she to be brought under the influence of his own acknowledged fascinations, condemned as he was to appear before her almost exclusively in the capacity of a common workman, labouring with the materials, and plying the tools, of an

art whose chief excellence consists in a kind of poetic ideality, far, far indeed beyond the rude surface it presents to an ordinary observer.

While the young sculptor was studying every day, and almost every hour, how to make an impression upon the heart of Magdalen, endeavouring to divert her by his vivacity, or to excite her sympathy by his pathos; sometimes when he had succeeded in attracting her eye, looking as he believed altogether irresistible, and watching the rose-tints which his looks or words had occasioned, deepening, and then fading away, upon her cheek.—While all this idle and fruitless pastime was occupying the mind of the handsome youth, circumstances over which he had no control, were preparing for him a prouder triumph than his own merits, or his powers of enchantment could ever have ensured.

The health of Steinberg had long been failing. A disease was preying upon his heart, with which none were acquainted but himself and his physician; and Magdalen, who had lived under her father's protection as a lamb under that of the shepherd, was shortly to hear tidings of the possibility of this protection being withdrawn from her for ever.

Never once until this awful communication was made to her, had it entered into the heart of the Sculptor's child to dream of standing in the world alone; and when first the idea presented itself, she hung upon the neck of an old and faithful domestic, who had been her mother's nurse, with all the imploring weakness of an orphan child.

It had been well meant by the father of Magdalen, when he determined within himself to keep his daughter unacquainted and unassociated with the world; but this

very ignorance, while it kept her comparatively pure and simple, rendered her helpless and dependent in the extreme; so that of all living creatures to be left to struggle with the necessities of life alone, Magdalen Steinberg was the most unfit. Her father felt this, and for her sake more than his own, he wished and tried to live. He consulted the ablest physicians, he studiously adopted every remedy prescribed; he ate, and slept, and took exercise by rule, but still his disease crept on; and still though he saw, with many an aching thought, the desolate doom of his only child, and often in the still night when other eyes were closed in sleep, he mentally watched her tracing, when he was gone, her solitary path,—yet still with this sad picture before him, he could not in his fondness wish her otherwise than as she was. No, there was a repose, a purity, a spirituality, as he was wont to call it, in this beloved object of his soul's idolatry, which he would not have exchanged for all those active virtues which might have made both herself and those around her more happy and more safe.

But what was to be done? The disease crept on, and on, and nothing could arrest its course. It was not that Steinberg was poor; he had more than sufficient to supply his daughter's pecuniary wants; and he had an increasingly lucrative profession to bequeath to any one who might follow in his steps. Sometimes when alone, his thoughts involuntarily turned to the youth he had, for the sake of early friendship, almost adopted as his son. But no. The youth was highly gifted, enterprising, and almost certain to succeed if—— if——. But here the father used to stop, and cast from him the unwelcome thought, as if never to be yielded to again. It did arise, however, almost perpetually, to the destruction of his

peace of mind ; for to him it was too evident what were, and would be, the nature of his pupil's temptations ; and all his genius, with his personal and mental recommendations, only rendered the idea more repulsive and appalling.

“ If Magdalen should ever love this youth,” the father would sometimes say to himself, “ she will cast her happiness into his hands, without calculation, and without reserve.” So, to prevent this calamity, he spoke against him in her presence, and he did this perhaps a little injudiciously, for by degrees the daughter began to think her father was unjust, and thus her sympathies became awakened for a stranger, and a foreigner, of whom she thought her father judged harshly ; and as he had no one else to take his part, she ventured sometimes to say, but still oftener to feel, that the youth had many excellences of character and disposition, which ought to be remembered, as well as his faults and eccentricities.

There was one fault, however, or rather one tendency, for it had as yet scarcely assumed a more serious aspect, which awakened in the mind of Steinberg the deepest concern for his pupil's safety, situated, as he was by the nature of his profession, amongst those with whom convivial meetings were not unfrequent, and whose pursuits were of a character to render the creations of an excited imagination almost necessary to supply the wants occasioned by indolence, and neglect of thought and study. Once, and only once, Steinberg had ventured to mention this tendency of the young sculptor's to his daughter ; when the burning crimson which suffused itself over her face, told but too plainly how deep was the impression his words had made.

Ignorant of the world as Magdalen from the circum-

stances of her situation naturally was, she had no idea of that mixture of good and evil, which is found in almost every human being. To her, virtue was that sinless and immaculate state in which, from the partial descriptions of her father, she believed her mother to have existed; while, on the other hand, vice was vice in all its horrors. That Louis Montreville was a being fit to rank in the scale of morals with one, or even both her parents, she had not allowed herself to doubt, until the moment when his name was mentioned by her father in connection with a vice so degrading in all its features, so utterly loathsome, so irreconcilable in her ideas with every single trait or feature of moral excellence, that to believe him guilty here, was in her opinion to associate him with the lowest dregs of humanity, with those melancholy outcasts from social fellowship, from which in her occasional walks she had shrinkingly turned aside, as if from creatures of a different species from her father and herself.

"No, no," she said to herself a thousand times, not only when she fixed her steady gaze undetected upon the fine features of the interesting youth, but when alone in her own chamber; "Louis is a genius, a poet, a lover of the fine arts, an admirer of the pure and the refined and the beautiful. He never can be what my father says—no, never!"

Thus listening to the sophistry of her own heart, rather than to the simple statement of plain facts which both her father and their old domestic were prepared to give, she set down this evidence also on the side of that catalogue of injuries, which she loved the young stranger the better for being compelled to endure.

Louis, on the other hand, felt, that although enjoying

in some degree the favour of his father's friend, and partaking in still greater measure of his kindness, he was gradually sinking in his esteem, and not without sufficient cause; for he knew better than any one else—better even than the old nurse, who sometimes, with silent step and uplifted finger, opened the door of her master's house to let him in at an untimely hour of night—he knew better than any one else could know, how far he was deviating from a course of life worthy either of his own approval, or that of his friends. Still he would reason with himself according to that dangerous mode of justification which pampered inclination maintains against wounded conscience. ‘Still,’ he argued, ‘it was but natural. All young men did the same. It was impossible to endure his life cooped up in that narrow cage. His art could not flourish, his genius could not soar, without those seasons of refreshment and exhilaration which he enjoyed with his competitors for fame.’ Yet sometimes, notwithstanding this cogent mode of reasoning, when suddenly the image of Magdalen presented itself to his mind—when her mild and fawn-like eyes, with all their trusting tenderness, were fixed upon him, but especially when he contemplated the probability of her orphan state, unprotected and almost friendless, an involuntary rush of better feeling swept the delusive mist from his eyes, and he determined for her sake to become a wiser and a better man.

“Magdalen,” said he one day, when, after Steinberg had left the room, the unconscious subject of these thoughts remained seated in the same position, and with her eyes still fixed upon the page she had been reading—“Magdalen, you do not believe all the bad things that are said of me, do you?”

"Oh! no," said Magdalen, smiling, and looking up with the trusting simplicity of a child.

It was a sweet confiding look, such as a cherub might wear while sheltered by an angel's wing; and Louis could not bear it, for it told him that he was a deceiver, and the next step to deception is injury. Not the bitterness of reproaches could have wrung his heart like that trusting look; and with the sudden impulse of a generous nature, he exclaimed—

"Yes, Magdalen, it is all too true! I am as bad, and worse, than they describe me."

"I do not believe it," said Magdalen, again; but this time her voice was sad, and low, and her eyes were riveted upon the book she held in her hand.

"Yes, Magdalen," continued Louis, "I am in the habit of mixing with lawless spirits, whose delight is in things which you abhor."

"I do not believe it," said Magdalen again, but her voice was fainter than before.

"Ask old Agnes," he continued—"ask her how often she has crept down at my secret signal, and opened your father's door for me when he was asleep."

"She has told me," replied Magdalen, "but I did not believe it."

"But you believe it now?"

"I believe it if you say so; but I believe also that you will do so no more."

"No, Magdalen, you must not believe that. I am not prepared yet, though I hope I soon shall be, to give up everything which your father disapproves. There is one condition on which I would promise him this, or any other thing he might require. Can you not guess what that condition is?"

Magdalen answered not. Her face was covered with confusion; but her eyes were still fixed upon her book, while they filled with tears, which fell heavily upon the open page, until her cheek grew pale again, and her lips were white as ashes. At last she said, with a voice which trembled with emotion,

“Do not bewilder me—above all, do not deceive me. I have ever been accustomed to hear the simple truth spoken by the lips I love.”

“Magdalen,” said Louis, “from this hour you shall hear the truth from me; but you must promise me one thing.”

“My father,” murmured Magdalen—and that instant the door opened, and Steinberg himself appeared, happily for her, too much absorbed by his own thoughts to observe the emotion which was still visible in her countenance.

And deep cause there was why Steinberg should think, and think seriously; for another interview with his physician had led him to relinquish all hope that his life could be prolonged beyond a very limited period. Whatever he had therefore to do in the settlement of his affairs, must be done quickly; and consequently he entered that very night into an examination of the state of his worldly circumstances, with a view to making over the property connected with his profession into other hands. It was but natural that Louis Montreville, who was rapidly rising in the practice of the art, to which from very early life his studies had been directed, should look with a prospect of succession; and in pursuance of this plan, his mother was consulted, and all other necessary steps taken preparatory to his future settlement as a sculptor on his own foundation.

Thus all went on, and everything seemed to be taken into consideration, except the disposal of poor Magdalen. On this subject, her father felt as if it would be death to think ; yet as disease pressed upon him, and the relative duties of parent and child grew more solemn, and more imperative, he compelled himself to ask his child what were her own wishes with regard to her future lot.

At first Magdalen had been unable to hear this subject mentioned without such a burst of feeling as finally overcame both her father and herself ; but now months had rolled over, with the prospect of their separation continually before her, and consequently she, like the rest, had become in a measure inured to the contemplation of this event, as of one which no human power could avert.

“ Tell me,” said her father, “ tell me frankly, my beloved child, what are the wishes of your inmost heart—it is of importance that I should know them.”

“ I think it is agreed,” said Magdalen, “ that Louis takes your business, and continues your profession, in his own name ?”

“ Yes, with this provision, that half the profits for the next three years shall be yours.”

“ Yes, that is what he told me.”

“ What I want to know, then, is, where you would like to live, who you would like to have with you, and, in short, everything else connected with your happiness.”

“ I should like to live here, of course, father ; I never dreamed of any other home.”

“ You cannot do that, my child ; the house and all which belongs to it will be the property of Louis Montreville.”

“Then, father, I should like to be his wife, as he has asked me to be, if——”

“What!” exclaimed the father, in such a frenzy of astonishment, that his daughter started back; and well she might, for there wanted but a moment of excitement like this to accelerate the crisis of his fate; and in another, while Magdalen stood speechless and transfixed with horror, her father’s features contracted into the narrow look of death, while his fine and manly form sunk lifeless at her feet.

“I have killed him!” said Magdalen—when the door was opened by old Agnes; who, startled by her master’s fall, had rushed up stairs—“I have killed my father!” she repeated; but still her eyes were tearless, and her quivering lips refused to utter any other explanation of the awful scene.

This old domestic was, however, of all the members of the household, most capable of understanding the circumstances of the case: she had been warned by the physician that her master’s death would be sudden; she knew the repugnance of the father to that one subject, upon which his daughter had so innocently touched; and she knew also the growing attachment of the young people to each other; an attachment which, while it occasioned her the deepest anxiety on behalf of her young mistress, she did not deem it safe to lay directly before her master, fearing the sad consequences which had now ensued.

The tearless agony with which Magdalen beheld her father fall was such as a delicate frame like hers was but ill calculated to sustain, and long before her mind was in any degree restored to its accustomed tone, the last sad duties to the dead had been faithfully performed by her

mother's nurse, under the direction of Louis Montreville, whose best feelings were all called into exercise on this melancholy occasion, and whose real respect for his father's friend was shown in a sorrow as sincere and as deep as if he had wept a second father.

No sooner was the ceremony of the funeral over, than Agnes, who felt herself Magdalen's sole protector, deemed it right to remove, with her almost senseless charge, to a distance from the familiar scenes of her childhood. For the benefit of a total change, she sought a retired and picturesque residence by the sea-shore, and here she watched, with all the assiduity of a mother, the returning health of the solitary orphan.

"Do you think it was I who killed him?" were the first words which Magdalen uttered after her reason had partially returned; and then the good old nurse explained to her how it was that her father had for a long time been hanging, as it were, between life and death, and that anything—the merest trifle in the world—which had the power to agitate him, might have produced the same awful consequences.

"Not," said she, some weeks after this, when Magdalen had renewed the subject, and when her assurances to this effect had also been renewed, "that I wish to make light of your father's feelings with regard to that young man; for indeed, indeed, my dear young lady, he is every way unfit for you."

"But, Agnes," remonstrated Magdalen, "he is very kind."

"The kinder, the more dangerous," replied Agnes.

"I think my poor father judged him hardly," said Magdalen again.

Agnes shook her head. "Your father knew, and I knew, and he knows too, that he is not a safe man to have the keeping of any woman's happiness."

"But you forget, Agnes, that he has neither mother nor sister to watch over him; a wife would supply the want of both—and I would be so careful of him."

"My poor dear creature, what would you do?"

"Oh, I would love him so faithfully."

"And would that make love in return?"

"Yes, I am sure it would, with a generous heart like his."

"And suppose you had a rival?"

"What!"

"Nay, don't look so indignant; I did not mean a rival like yourself: but suppose you had a rival in the wine, that cheered his heart more than you were able to cheer it with all your love?"

"Hush! Agnes, hush! you will drive my senses away again."

"Then you must listen to me, dear Magdalen. Was I not your mother's nurse? Have I not held you, an infant, in my arms, by night and day, and rocked you many a weary hour upon my bosom; and can I behold you rushing into wretchedness, and not speak out, and tell you, as I do again, and again, that if you marry that young man, your doom is sealed, and your heart broken, as surely as I sit here?"

"But, Agnes, we are both talking wildly; you see he does not come to see me; he has not even written, though I should have thought he would have done that, in common kindness."

"It is a kindness that can well be spared."

"Perhaps not so well as you think, Agnes. It is a

hard thing for a woman to feel lonely, and desolate, as I do now."

"But why should you feel lonely, dear? I am sure I have no thoughts of leaving you."

"Thank you, dear Agnes. I never for a moment suspected that you would; but——"

"I know what you are going to say. You are going to say that I busy myself too much with the affairs of the house, and so leave you, as you call it, alone."

"No, Agnes, that was not exactly the kind of loneliness I meant. But no matter."

And Magdalen suddenly changed the subject, by introducing some question relative to those all-important household matters, about which she would have felt no objection to her companion being still more earnestly occupied than she was; so little did her society afford, to fill the blank which her mistress found in the existence to which she now appeared to be doomed. Fond as the orphan girl might otherwise have been of making the young sculptor the subject of her conversation with Agnes, there was one cause, to her a very sufficient one, why she often found it prudent thus to break off abruptly. It was a latent fear lest Agnes should touch unfeelingly the character of Louis; above all, lest she should speak of that one besetting sin, of which Magdalen never would have believed him to be guilty, but for the evidence of her own senses. This evidence he had most unconsciously afforded her, and the impression it had made was too deep to be effaced.

It was one night when her father was suffering more than usual from an accession of his painful malady. Louis had gone to meet a party of his friends, having promised to return at a certain hour. At this hour, the invalid,

who had all that day been confined to one position, had pleased himself with the idea of being assisted by his young friend to make a change from one apartment to another ; and both he and his daughter confidently relied upon this anticipated help. The hour arrived, however, but Louis came not. Another hour, and the invalid, restless and impatient, spoke harshly of his thoughtless and selfish pupil.

“ Not selfish ! ” Magdalen exclaimed, with more warmth than she was accustomed to betray ; and her ear was turned with such aching anxiety to listen for his approaching step, that not a sound was heard in the house but by her imagination it was immediately construed into that which she most desired.

At last he came. Magdalen flew to meet him. She looked in his face, but suddenly started back, and covering her eyes with both her hands, she stood leaning against the wall, and shuddering as if she had beheld something too monstrous to be looked at again.

It was not, however, that Magdalen was capable of loathing the being she most loved. It was, that the conviction then flashed upon her, of all being too true which her father and Agnes had said against him. She had, until this moment, defended him with a clear and honest conviction of his innocence. She could never defend him again, now. That happiness was denied her. Or if she did, it could only be with that inward misgiving—that sinking of the heart—that sliding back from its once firm hold, which is worse a thousand times to bear than the bitterest reproaches heaped by others upon the object of our affection.

Magdalen, too, was unable ever to forget the spectacle she beheld that night. It haunted her like a fearful

and ominous dream, creating apprehension and distrust, where there never had been the shadow of a doubt before. In vain she fixed her eyes upon the beautiful countenance of the young sculptor. In vain she contemplated his character in the light of a genius, a lover of the fine arts, an admirer of the pure and the beautiful. All would not do. She had seen that look—she had heard that laugh—both might come again; and she who was fatherless and motherless, and almost without a friend, shrunk back into her solitude, not satisfied with her safety, but yet appalled with the magnitude of her danger.

“He is coming at last!” said Magdalen one day to Agnes, with a look of more than wonted satisfaction, and at the same time holding an open letter in her hand, while her flushed cheek, and sparkling eyes, betrayed that more had been said in those charmed lines than belonged to the mere announcement of an intended visit.

“Who is coming?” said Agnes, with that assumed absence of understanding with which we sometimes endeavour to resist an unpleasant conviction.

“Louis himself is coming,” replied Magdalen—“I always told you he would not forget me.

“Forget, indeed!” muttered Agnes to herself—“does the fowler forget the bird he has caught in his snare, or the angler the fish that struggles at the end of his line? Forget, indeed! If I might have a fortune for asking for it, do you think I should forget to make it my own?”

“You are rambling on very fast,” said Magdalen; “it seems rather strange that all these notions should have risen simply out of the proposed visit of an old friend. Would you not like to see Louis yourself?”

“No, not here.”

“What is your objection to him?—you often appeared to be great friends when we all lived together.”

“The youth had a winning way with him—I don’t deny that—and could persuade one out of one’s better reason—the more’s the pity.”

“And is that all?—has he nothing about him worthy of being admired beyond his winning way?”

“Admired! why, yes, that is a different thing.”

“Different from what?”

“From being loved?”

“Is there nothing about him worthy of being loved, then?—Come, Agnes, be candid, and speak without prejudice for once.”

“If the darkest of all eyes, and the brightest of all raven-hair, and the wildest laugh, and the lightest heart, are reasons why a man should be loved, then is the youth well worthy of the affection you bestow upon him.”

“And will you not add to this catalogue of merits, the capability of feeling affection in return?”

Agnes shook her head.

“Tell me, good Agnes, what you really think on this subject—I am more serious than you suppose.”

“I think, then, that perhaps he is capable of loving according to the measure of man’s love in general.”

“And don’t you think that men can love as well as women?”

Agnes laughed outright.

“What can you mean, Agnes?” asked Magdalen.

“I mean,” she replied, “that when a man finds his house in disorder, and wants somebody to put it right, he calls this love; when he is alone, too, and things don’t go pleasantly, and he wants somebody to complain to, and find fault with, and lay the blame upon, he calls this love.

When no one cares for him, and he gets put down in society, and wants to bind himself for life to some being who will serve and flatter him, and admire his very faults, this, too, he calls love. Man's love, indeed !”

“ What is love, then, Agnes, according to your notions of it ? ”

“ Love, as I take it, is that which is perpetually giving, without asking to receive. It is love that will make a woman cling to another person's child, and nurse and cherish it as if it was her own. It is love that keeps her watchful even while it sleeps through the long night and heavy day, when not so much as a smile rewards her for her care. It is love which makes her follow this child in after-life, when it grows up to wealth and beauty, and looks not back with fondness, nor turns with affection, to the companion of its infant sports. It is love that makes the welfare of this child so precious in her sight, that she would rather die than trust its happiness to careless hands.”

“ You are right, Agnes,” said Magdalen, while the tears glistened in her eyes ; “ you have indeed been to me the friend you have described ; and yours, I know, is love.”

“ Yet it cannot satisfy you.”

“ No, not entirely ; besides, if it did, in the common course of nature, you would die, and leave me.”

“ There are worse things in life than to be left by the dead.”

“ What can be worse ? ”

“ To be left by the living.”

“ You don't think that Louis would be faithful, then ? ”

“ Not as I should be faithful.”

“ Agnes, you do not know him.”

"There are different ways of knowing people : you know him as an equal—I as an inferior."

"And as such, you cannot know the real goodness of his heart."

"Perhaps I know him better than you think," was the murmured reply of Agnes, as she took up her work, and prepared with a heavy heart to leave the room ; for to her watchful eye the affairs of her mistress were beginning to assume a very serious aspect ; and promptly, and earnestly, as she would have acted in them, had such endeavours been consistent with her situation, it was her part, as a servant, to submit and be still.

Thus all things went on, exactly as she least wished they should. The young Sculptor was permitted to come, and visit the daughter of his father's friend ; and she, with all the gentleness and simplicity which belonged to her nature, received him with the joy of a sister, and perhaps with something more. In fact, her situation was so lonely, so utterly destitute of all companionship suited to her taste, that had her visitor been only an ordinary acquaintance, she could scarcely have met him without a thrill of delight ; and because he had professed to love her better than ever brother loved a sister, Magdalen could not see why she ought to be less grateful, or less pleased.

There is so much too in solitude, in having been long shut out from the communion of kindred souls, and, above all, in having been recently deprived of a last and only protector—in having closed the eyes which had watched with untiring fondness all our familiar ways, commending what was right, and forgiving what was wrong—there is so much in all this, to woman's desolate heart, that the lover who would seek her under such

circumstances, need fear little for the success of his suit.

Louis Montreville, however, trusted less, in the secret of his heart, to the situation of Magdalen, than to his own powers of commanding both love and admiration ; and thus he made his appearance at the cottage with a light and buoyant spirit ; entertaining as little doubt of his own success, as of the conquerable nature of the female heart in general.

But rather than reveal what passed between the two friends thus met again after months of absence, let us watch them with the eye of old Agnes, and see how they walked out upon the sea-shore, and sat upon the rocks—the cold, damp rocks, at the imminent risk of the young lady's life, and returned not until the day closed, and sometimes not even until the autumn moon had risen so as to light them on their way ; and in spite of all the remonstrances of Agnes, who declared that no good ever came of walking out by moonlight, how they did the same thing the next day, and the next, until the time for the young man's departure came, when the maiden drooped like a flower under the first breath of a cold east wind.

There was still, however, one precious evening—the last, to enjoy ; yet Magdalen looked not only sorrowful, but distressed. It was evidently not merely the prospect of separation, and of the long age of dulness that would follow, which preyed upon her mind. There was a struggle, a conflict, which she vainly endeavoured to conceal by seeking in the solitude of her own chamber for strength to make the decision which must be made that night. The intention of Magdalen had been to ask support, and the guidance she so much needed, in the

language of prayer ; but how to pray for right direction, when inclination had already made plain the way, was a difficulty she had not thought of until she found herself alone. She was alone too in the chamber which was sacred to all her fondest recollections of her father ; and although he had laid no injunction upon her as to the line of conduct she should pursue, his sentiments had been too often, and too clearly expressed, for her to doubt one moment of his decided disapprobation of her union with the young Sculptor.

“ On this one subject,” she said, giving utterance to her thoughts, “ my father always spoke with prejudice. Had he known him better—Oh fool !” she exclaimed, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, “ do I know him myself ? Is there any power in earth or heaven, that can give me back my confidence ?” And Magdalen, wringing her hands, gave way to a passionate burst of tears, such as her eyes had seldom known.

A less interested observer than Louis could not have failed to perceive that Magdalen had been weeping. Her grief, however, was easily accounted for by her lover, by the circumstance of his own departure being so near at hand ; and with his happiness still unclouded by a single shade, he lost not the last opportunity of urging upon Magdalen the importance of a decision on which he calculated with the utmost confidence in its being favourable to himself.

There was nothing so distracting to the mind of Magdalen as suspicion. The most unwelcome truth would have harassed her less ; and yet, to speak plainly to Louis on the subject, to which her thoughts were perpetually turning, seemed to her impossible, so repulsive, so degrading was every feature of that spectre

which haunted her by day, and visited her dreams by night.

"Is there any difficulty in the way?" said Louis, when, after all his arguments, and all his eloquence, Magdalen still hesitated, "Have you any doubts of me?"

Magdalen turned upon him the keen searching look her father used to wear, but all she could say was "If—if—I were quite sure."

"Sure of what?" asked Louis. "Speak plainly, dearest Magdalen. Trust me at least with your thoughts, if I am not worthy to be trusted with your happiness."

"Do you not remember one night?" she replied.

"What night? I cannot comprehend your meaning."

"One awful night, when my father and I waited for you?"

"Oh! now I understand. You foolish girl, to make such a mountain of so small a matter. You mean, then, if I will never come home to you in that state again?"

"I do."

"Then, Magdalen, here I promise you," and the graceful lover sank on one knee, and uttered such a vow—so earnest and so solemn, that Magdalen looked up with eyes too full of joy for tears, and inwardly returned thanks to the Father of mercies, whose smile she now believed would bless the union to which she was about to pledge herself.

Her doubts once cleared away, her fears dispelled, Magdalen felt no difficulty, and affected no reserve; but plighted her heart and her hand with the same unhesitating trust, which a child reposes in a parent; and when she met her lover on the following morning, it was with a deep impression of the solemn certainty that their future lot was one; that for weal or woe they two were bound together; and that, let the rest of the world take

what course it might, their path, whether rough or smooth, whether amongst roses or thorns, must be the same.

Much is said of the solemn and important act, which, as a public ceremonial, binds two human beings together for life; but to a right-minded, and deep-feeling woman, *that* can scarcely be less solemn, which even by the faint whisper of assent in secret, and alone with the companion of her choice, pledges her to be to him all which that sacred union demands of a true and faithful wife. From that moment she is no longer her own. She lives not for herself. All that she does, and all that she designs, must have reference to another; and while she still continues to walk along the same path, and mixes in society as one of the multitude; she bears within her heart a sort of second existence, an "inner principle of life," a secret treasury of thoughts and feelings, from whence, almost exclusively, she draws her happiness, or her misery.

Magdalen Steinberg felt all this, perhaps more intensely, that she had fewer sources of interest than other women, to interfere with this; and when she met her lover on the morning of his departure, it was with a pale and thoughtful countenance, as if the anxieties of her future lot already weighed upon her mind; while Louis, buoyant and elated, heedlessly rallied her upon the sadness of her looks, until tears started to her eyes, and then he very naturally pitied her, thinking she was suffering from the prospect of parting with him so soon.

"There is one thing I have not told you yet," said Magdalen with quivering lips, and downcast eyes.

"You must tell it me now, then," said Louis, taking out his watch, "and without much delay, for I have no time to waste."

"It is of no consequence now," said Magdalen, with

the tone of one whose warm heart is suddenly chilled—whose deep feelings are suddenly frozen on the surface.

The fact was, she was about to describe to her lover the peculiar nature of her own temperament, how she had never been used to anything but the tenderest affection, and how unkindness or neglect would soon bring her sufferings to an end, by terminating her life.

And Louis Montreville went away, exulting in the success of his suit, yet almost wholly unconscious of the real value of the treasure he had made his own. Indeed, how should it have been otherwise? for what key of sympathy was there in his nature, to unlock the secrets of hers? Light, volatile, and gay, he flew back to the pleasures and pursuits he had left, thinking only of the time when he should have a beautiful bride to cheer his solitude.

In his profession, however, Louis was still laborious and persevering, though much of the secret of his industry might be attributed to the success by which his ambition and his vanity were gratified, almost beyond his expectations. He was evidently a rising man, and as such was introduced into society, where his striking figure, and pleasing address, rendered him almost a universal favourite. Thus the mirth of his laugh, the drollery of his ever-exuberant fancy, the good humour and grace of his familiar conduct, with the brilliance of his genius, and the facility with which he seized a new idea and turned it to account, were gradually drawing him towards the centre of an admiring circle, where, if his enjoyments were enhanced, his temptations were also alarmingly increased. Besides which, he had now no domestic check upon his conduct, no watchful eye to notice his return at night, no kind but authoritative voice to commend, or to condemn. The consequences may be easily inferred. Louis plunged

headlong into that vortex of dissipation, into which thousands have fallen ; while none knew but himself the extent to which in his mad career he was running. And still the flattering unction was perpetually laid to his soul, that this career was but temporary ; that he could quit the course he had chosen whenever it was his pleasure or his interest to do so ; and, above all, that his approaching marriage would put an end at once to his folly, and settle him for life as a regular and sober man.

Without any material change, then, except what consisted in telling his associates that it was the last time he should join them in their revels, that he was about to grow wise, and get married, this important event of his life came on ; and Magdalen was again placed within the shelter of her native home, and again she sat in the old window, and tuned her harp beneath the shadow of the vine-leaves, through which the chequered sunbeams had often fallen where her infant footsteps played.

Magdalen still felt a void—a cold blank void—whenver she looked towards that part of the room where the venerable figure of her father used to be, and a sigh involuntarily would burst from her lips, when she thought of his watchful eye, his listening ear, and those familiar expressions of parental love, which no music, and no charm of hers would ever waken more. These recollections, natural and not wholly unwelcome as they were, formed almost the only barrier to Magdalen's perfect happiness ; for perfect she thought it, never having known any higher. And perfect indeed it was, so far as love could make it.

Louis Montreville, always sanguine and enthusiastic in whatever charmed his fancy, was, for a time at least, as much devoted to his lovely wife, as she, in the secret of her heart, could have desired. Every moment of his

time, which could be spared from his profession, was spent in her society ; and so far from feeling the loss of that which he had relinquished, he cheerfully, nay even proudly bore the jests of his associates, believing himself to be a richer and a happier man than any of them. If, however, on any occasion he consented to make one in the parties he had previously been the most forward to join, it was only for a brief space ; for his return at an early hour was as certain as the never-failing smile of welcome which awaited him at home.

" You see, Agnes," said Magdalen to her faithful attendant one day, " Louis is not the husband you anticipated he would be. Not once has he left me longer than absolute necessity required ; not once has he returned as you prophesied he would."

" It's dangerous talking to married people about either their husbands or their wives"—was all the reply which Magdalen's observation elicited ; and the speaker went on with her work, with as much earnestness as if the subject was one of no sort of interest to her.

" It can never be dangerous to speak of what is good," observed Magdalen again.

" If you happen to see it," replied her companion, rather sharply.

" Now don't be ill-natured, Agnes," said Magdalen—" You must see, if you would be willing to allow it, that Louis is all that is kind, all that is excellent, to me."

" I don't dispute it," was the cold reply. " I only wish it may last."

" Perhaps, Agnes, you do not approve of marriage in general?"

" Why, no ; I can't say that I do think much of it ; or that I ever did."

"Or, I suppose you would have tried it for yourself."

"Perhaps I might; but I waited to see how it answered with others first."

"And the result was, that from what you saw, you were afraid to venture? But now, Agnes, you shall make your observations again; and if you see Louis and me as happy in ten years, as we are now, you shall be married too."

"Say five years, instead of ten."

"Well, five then."

"Or three,"

"Three, then, if you prefer it. But tell me, Agnes, were not my father and mother happy?"

"As happy as woman's heart could wish, until your mother died."

"Do you think I shall die then?"

"No, it is not *that* I fear."

"Yet, Agnes, I am far from strong."

"I know it, child—I know it too well."

"I feel sometimes as if I wanted all the kindness of Louis, and all your good nursing, to keep me as I am. A little falling off in either, and I think I should soon be laid beside my parents in their last and quiet home."

"I know it all," said Agnes, as her eyes filled with tears. "I know it all, my poor child, too well."

"It is wrong, however," resumed Magdalen, "to make troubles out of things never likely to happen. Believe me, dear Agnes, these dark days will never come, so far as Louis is concerned; and as for yourself, I am sure *you* will not leave me."

"I may be called, however, before you, in the course of nature," said Agnes; "and then"—

"Then God will be good to me," replied Magdalen, "and temper the wind to his shorn lamb."

It was late one winter's night, when Magdalen and her faithful attendant held this conversation. Louis had dined with a party of his friends that day, and had not then returned. It was past his usual hour—past the hour of his promise; and Magdalen chid herself for having extorted such a promise, fearing he might feel too much condemned when he should return, to find that he had outstaid his time. It was a winter's night, and the wind blew fiercely, and the fond and trusting wife thought only, of how her husband would meet the bitter blast, and regretted a thousand times, that she had not better prepared him for the midnight cold. Nor were these the only thoughts which troubled her, for the presence of Agnes became irksome, and she began to quail under the searching look with which her eye was ever and anon uplifted to the timepiece, and then turned upon her, as if to say, "This is just what I predicted. He is beginning now to let you know what is to be expected from such a husband."

It was Magdalen's turn, however, to cast towards her companion significant and triumphant glances, when at last her husband returned, bringing with him such excellent excuses for having been detained, that her confidence was more than restored; and as Agnes silently withdrew, now that her mistress no longer needed her society to cheer her watching and waiting hours, Magdalen could not refrain from exclaiming, on purpose that her servant might hear, "I knew you must have some good reasons for staying out so late."

It is true, Louis looked more than usually flushed and excited that night; but this the fond wife readily believed

to have been occasioned by the speed with which he had hastened home; and she secretly loved him the better for having injured him, though only by the shadow of a doubt. She loved him the better, for in what other way could she atone for her injustice, and her want of faith?

And how many reasons were there arising out of the occurrences of every day, why Magdalen should love her husband with more and more devotedness of heart—reasons originating chiefly from her own isolated situation, which had hitherto shut her out almost entirely from the fellowship of companions of her own age; so that all those treasures of heart and feeling, which naturally flow forth from the eloquent lips of youth, had been with her like a sealed book, which none had ever read, and of which she herself was ignorant. By poets in their dreams of beauty and sublimity, her sympathies had hitherto been almost exclusively called forth, and the fruitless waste of this expenditure had necessarily left her bosom void. But now the scene was changed.—How changed to her! To live in the daily and hourly interchange of thoughts, which before she had never breathed to any human ear. To have a treasure, and one so passing rich, committed to her care, when she had hitherto been but a child herself, and consequently the care of others—to have something to expect, when the hour approached for that well-known step to tread the gallery floor—to have a world of calculations in the meantime, upon what he would have thought, or felt, or seen, or suffered, during that temporary separation—to have the ruffled brow to smooth, the casually averted eye to win back—the fading smile to rekindle, and the fond caress to invite—all these, it is true, were but drops in the cup,

or items in the whole ; but then that cup, how full it was of joy ! that whole, how vast in its extent !

Yes ; Magdalen indeed was happy, as a child is happy on a bright May morning, when, rejoicing in the simple fact of its existence, it plucks the flowers, without asking whether they will fade ; and sports in the sunshine, without remembering that the sun must set.

And Louis would sometimes gaze upon his lovely bride until his eyes would fill with tears, to think how unworthy he was in reality to be the source of so much happiness to one so single-hearted, and so true. In all points of mere external merit, or even of talent and of taste, Louis would not readily have believed himself outshone ; but in those of real intrinsic moral worth, he certainly had his own misgivings ; so much so, that as he learned better to understand the unsophisticated being whose happiness he had taken into his keeping, he sometimes seriously feared it would not be possible for him to discharge the duties of the office he had assumed. If, for instance, the pure eyes of Magdalen could look for a single moment upon his habits, and his character, as they really were ! This idea always startled him, especially since he had no longer the consolation of thinking such habits were now laid aside ; for he had lately, in a manner unknown to his wife, resumed his intimacy with some of his former associates, and it was only by inventing excuses, and pretending that business had additional claims upon his attention, that he could beguile her of complaints about the unexpected loss of his society during so many of her evening hours. Besides which, Louis had a secret spring of better feeling still occasionally flowing over his bosom like a flood ; and then it was, that he was guilty of the weakness of unbidden tears ; then it was,

that the situation of that orphan girl claimed all his tenderness ; and then it was that he questioned whether the treasures of his home, the bright hearth, and the beaming smiles which ever awaited him there, were not more than worth all the enjoyment which he found, or even sought, elsewhere.

There is something in the contemplation of trusting innocence, so acutely, so profoundly affecting to a sensitive and generous heart, contrasted as it is with the hard calculating spirit of the world, armed at all points, and ever on the defensive against treachery and wrong ; that, happily for human nature, there are few bosoms so stern as not to be capable of tenderness towards a simple and confiding child. And when the same childlike spirit, with its trust unshaken, is maintained through ripper years, in connection with maturer feelings, and more enlightened and expansive thoughts, the tenderness we should have felt for the child is deepened into the profoundest interest for the being who can thus remain uncontaminated by the artificial, usages of a cold and pitiless world ; but who at the same time is, alas ! but too likely to be made the sport of that world's treachery, and the victim of its selfish calculations.

Louis Montreville was not yet so hardened by the course of conduct he had chosen for himself, as to be insensible to the superior charm with which the character of Magdalen was invested ; he therefore determined, that let his own habits be what they might, the orphan girl whom he had solemnly pledged himself to love and cherish, should, so far as he was capable of effecting such an object, be kept unsullied by the world. For this purpose he received no company, and seldom went abroad with his wife ; more especially, he refused to take her to

any of those places of public amusement, at which in her girlish curiosity, she sometimes expressed a wish to be present; simply, as she said, that she might enjoy what he enjoyed, and be better able to understand and converse with him upon subjects which appeared to afford him such lively interest.

"You are better at home, dearest," was the reply with which Louis always warded off the expression of such wishes.

"Then why are not you also better at home?" was the very natural inquiry which usually followed. "Oh, Louis, I am learning the most delightful air. I am sure you will be enchanted with it. Or, shall I read to you this sweet poem, as I used to read to my poor father? He used to say that he gathered more ideas worth retaining from the books I read to him, than he could ever find in the society of other artists. Do you really find their company and conversation so necessary to the pursuit of your profession as you say, Louis?"

"I have told you once how necessary it is, Magdalen; and I do not wish to be asked the question again. It seems as if you thought I could deceive you."

"Oh, no, Louis, I am sure you would not do that; but I am so ignorant of the world that—"

"That you had better not talk about it," replied Louis, rather hastily; and he left his young wife that evening, thinking, and not for the first time, that it was quite possible for a woman to be very sweet, and very beautiful, and very good, and yet very tiresome.

CHAP. III.

THE YOUNG SCULPTOR.

MORE than a year had now elapsed since the marriage of Magdalen Steinberg. In addition to her other sources of domestic interest, she had become a mother; and if her cup of happiness was full before, what must be the measure of its overflowings now? But, hush! she is lulling a babe to sleep on her bosom, and, young as it is, already the reflection of a mother's smile is beginning to brighten on its face. What stillness is there! for it is nearly midnight, and not a sound is to be heard in that dimly-lighted chamber; and Agnes, the old domestic, sits moping and speechless by the fire, watching the dying embers drop from the bars, and breathing ever and anon a deep-drawn sigh, with a simultaneous uplifting of the fingers of the hand which rests upon her knee, while the sinking of the breath after that heavy sigh, and the falling of the fingers, keep time together, and seem to indicate that thus the last drops of consolation are ebbing out of her portion of the mingled cup of human life.

How little do persons in the situation of Agnes know of that delicate and easy tact by which sorrow may sometimes be beguiled of some portion of its weight. Thus, while the poor will plunge at once into their own or other people's troubles, making them as much the sub-

ject of conversation as they are of thought ; we find in that sphere of life, where the refinements of feeling are perhaps a little too much cultivated, that anything is talked about rather than the calamity over which the mind still lingers, despite the constant effort of those who would lead it off into any channel except that by which it is absorbed.

Agnes knew little of the art of ministering to a mind diseased. Skilful as she was in caring for the body, she had remained through life unacquainted with the fact, that there are wounds which no hand should probe, causes of anxiety to which no words should allude, and sufferings which no sympathy should attempt to reach. Thus, when her master, as was his custom now, spent many of his evenings, and the early part of the night, from home, instead of beguiling her mistress of her weary watchings by tales of the olden-time—or, above all other themes to the heart of a young mother, by the comparison or contrast of other children with her own—she sate as now the picture of despondency, looking such unutterable things that Magdalen would sometimes rouse herself so far as to rally her old attendant upon the cheerless nature of her companionship during their evening hours.

And was Magdalen herself still happy ? So far as the objects of her affection were multiplied she was indeed ; but in proportion as the warmth of a new existence had been kindled in her bosom, she looked like one whom that warmth was consuming by its inward and secret power. Her eyes, which had always been beautiful, were now doubly so ; for ever, as she gazed upon her child, their deepened expression beamed forth with such a softened radiance, as nothing but the fervour of a mother's affec-



The young . Ralph

Printed by J. & W. Groombridge & Sons

tion could impart; and then her cheek too was more flushed at times, as with a sort of hectic; and over the rose-tints glowing there, fell the dark shadow of her long eyelashes, and the darker folds of her richly-flowing hair.

But was she happy? Ask any single individual amongst the sons and daughters of earth, whose all has been cast at the feet of one idol, and that of clay.

No, there were many causes now why Magdalen should spend feverish and sleepless nights, besides those which originated in the natural delicacy of her constitution. The thing which she had so greatly feared, had come upon her. Her husband had neglected, she thought, he had grown weary of her altogether. At all events, he had given himself up to other associates, and the sin which had always most easily beset him; and instead of making the most of his day of prosperity, and pushing on the success which at one time dawned upon his efforts, instead of devoting himself body and mind to a profession, which, highly gifted as he was, required all he could give to it, of both; he endeavoured to satisfy his friends and patrons with promises which were never fulfilled; and while he eagerly undertook everything proposed to him, he completed nothing.

In this state of things, it is astonishing how rapidly the pecuniary resources of a family find the means of ebbing away. Not the strictest economy on the part of the female portion of the household can be of any important avail, to stem the current which then sets in, to flow on with accelerated force towards the sea of ruin. Of this economy, however, poor Magdalen knew nothing; and out of her total ignorance of domestic affairs, and the habits of unoccupied listlessness which had grown

upon her as a motherless girl, arose the first secret complaint in the heart of her husband, and the first justification of himself for leaving a house where a want of order and good management were becoming daily more evident.

"I am such as you found me," poor Magdalen would often plead in her own defence. "I was never taught these things, and my father was always satisfied."

But all would not do. Her husband appeared to expect, that she should be at the same time the calm still beauty of the studio, whom he had seen sitting contented at her father's feet; and the active bustling housewife, who could heal, by the magic of her skill and her economy, any breaches he might choose to make in the order of their household. Of failing health, and of the extra occupation which a young child would occasion, he made no account. It was sufficient for him that Magdalen was not dressed with elegance—that she was not forthcoming when he called—that the child could not always be laid aside for the harp—sufficient to furnish an excuse for doing what was most agreeable to him—for leaving her society, and plunging into the convivial excesses of another evening.

In this manner their affairs went on. Magdalen had no one to complain to, and would not have uttered a syllable of complaint if she had. And amidst all the trouble, and confusion, and heart-sickness, and perplexity, that little child grew strong, and flourished, and laughed, and sported, and twined its arms around the neck of its sad mother, who sometimes looked at it with an expression of passionate fondness, and then turned away her head as if the sight of its innocent gambols was more than she could bear.

But if, as is sometimes the case, Louis Montreville felt annoyed at the manner in which his wife devoted her time and her attention to her infant charge, that infant itself was an object of irresistible attraction, which his heart was unable to withstand; and often, when not quite himself, he lavished endearments both upon the mother and the child, so extravagant in their expression, that Magdalen would sometimes shrink away repelled, if not disgusted; and then he would say harsh things about her coldness, and accuse her of driving him away from home.

All the reply which Magdalen was ever known to make to such accusations, was by a look—a pitiful, appealing look—such as he had almost lost the power of understanding; for not only were his nightly indulgences becoming more frequent, but such was the state of his affairs, that in the hope of getting rid of anxious and perplexing thoughts, he drowned his faculties in partial oblivion during the greater part of every day.

It was late one night on his return home, that Louis was met at the door by old Agnes, who, with significant nod and gesture, endeavoured to make him understand, what he was wholly incapable of comprehending. In vain she lifted up her hand in sign of caution, in vain she implored him to tread lightly on the stairs. It was all one to him just then, whether his wife was dead, or his child stolen, or whether both these calamities had occurred. With dizzy gaze, and senseless nod, he answered all her entreaties; and staggering up to his own apartment, was at last made to understand, that he must find another for that night; not, however, until an altercation had taken place sufficiently loud to awake the most distant sleeper in the house.

The following morning at an early hour, Agnes stood at the bedside of her master, holding a night-lamp in her hand. She had evidently been watching all night, and while he endeavoured to shake off the heavy sleep and burning headache which still stupified his senses, she succeeded at last in making him understand that her mistress had been taken alarmingly ill on the previous evening; but that she had not dared to send for him, knowing but too well the state in which he would return, and fearing the effect it might have upon her. "Her case," she said, "was the rupture of a bloodvessel, occasioned by a violent fit of weeping."

"Weeping? what for?" asked Louis.

"For you," replied Agnes, with as much meaning in her looks, as the words themselves conveyed.

"For me?" exclaimed Louis, suddenly starting from his pillow. "Then I have killed her!" and he would that instant have rushed into the apartment of his wife, had not Agnes, who was a powerful woman for her age, forcibly grasped his arm, and told him that the precious life of her mistress was now depending solely upon the care with which she might be preserved from every kind of excitement, both of body and mind.

Notwithstanding this caution, many hours had not elapsed, before Louis was alone with his wife in her own apartment, where, after securing the door against all intruders, he knelt down beside the bed on which she lay as pale, and almost as motionless, as if death had already sealed her doom; yet there he was, with her thin white hand clasped in his, his eloquent lips pouring forth the language of his first love, with many a solemn vow, and awful denunciation of judgment upon himself if that vow should be broken, that he would never offend again, or

wring the heart whose peace he valued more than his own, by a repetition of the excesses he had committed.

And Magdalen was happy again; for does not all human happiness exist by comparison? and contrasted with the long dark night of loveless and joyless solitude through which she had lately passed, was it not happiness to hear again the voice of affection—the music of her childhood—sounding in her ear, though it might be on the brink of the grave? And was it not happiness, too, to know that he whose good in every sense was more precious to her than her own, was about to return from his wanderings, as she fondly hoped, to redeem the past.

Great as the excitement of this scene necessarily was, (for to some minds the shock of unexpected happiness is more than that of grief,) Magdalen, contrary to all the predictions of Agnes, continued to recover. Nor was it long before she resumed her place again in the family, with—now, a strange spectacle to behold—her husband ever at her side.

So entire was the revulsion of feeling in the mind of Louis when convinced of the reality of that calamity which seemed to hang as it were by a single hair above his head, that for many days he lived almost as abstemiously as the patient herself, determined that nothing of an intoxicating nature should pass his lips, until symptoms of recovery had appeared, to cheer his drooping spirit. Now, however, Magdalen was so far restored as to be recommended by her medical attendant to take a small quantity of wine every day; and Louis, who kindly poured it out for her, in the gladness of his feelings, very naturally filled a glass for himself. One, glass, however, was nothing to a man of his habits, and without any thought of harm, he took another, and another, feeling,

as people say they do on such occasions, both better and happier for the welcome draught. As a very natural consequence too, he did the same thing on the morrow, and on the following day ; and so on for a week or more, never dreaming of danger, but feeling only that the wine was weak and insufficient ; and so he was induced at last to add to the stimulus necessary for rendering his enjoyment more complete, a more dangerous and potent draught, which again had to be increased ; and so on again, until by degrees his insatiable craving returned, and along with it the same degree of restlessness, irritability, and depression, which sent him again into convivial society, to escape from the dulness and monotony of his own fireside.

The gradual falling back of her husband into his former habits was watched by poor Magdalen with the most intense anxiety ; but, with a delicacy ill-suited to the case, she never ventured either to warn him of his danger, or to entreat him for her sake to refrain. There are strange anomalies in human nature, and it is not the least, that we have sometimes the greatest difficulty in speaking on subjects which are the most constant companions of our thoughts. Perhaps the feeling which operated upon the mind of Magdalen, was a conviction of the pain it would occasion her to have given cause for reproof of such a nature ; and therefore, judging of her husband by the same rule, she shrunk from inflicting upon him, what she could so ill have borne herself. At all events, she spoke not ; and the tears she wept in secret, left no other trace upon her cheeks, than an increase of paleness at one part of the day, and an increase of hectic at another.

“Sir,” said Agnes one day to her master, laying her

hand upon his arm to detain him, as he was about to leave the house "If I might speak to you for a minute."

"Well, Agnes, what is the matter?" said Louis, stepping back rather reluctantly.

"Matter enough," murmured Agnes; "but that's not to the point. I want to know, sir, what is to be done about getting this poor dear soul removed to a warmer place for the winter?"

"Of whom are you speaking, Agnes, and what do you mean?"

"I am speaking of your wife, sir; and I mean that she will not live through the coming winter here."

"Nonsense! woman, how foolishly you talk. Who told you that Magdalen would not live through the winter?"

"The doctor told me so."

"What doctor?"

"The doctor I called in to look at the child; for as to having a doctor for herself, poor dear, she would not hear of that. So I spoke to him before he went in, and told him to notice the mother as well as the child."

"And what did he say?"

"He said she was dying."

"Impossible!"

"Why, everybody sees it but you. The very passers-by, when we walk out with the child, look back, and pity her; and I heard one of them say the other day, 'that poor lady is not long for this world.'"

"You astonish me, Agnes. It seems to me that Magdalen is so much better."

"She is just better, as the sky is brighter when the sun goes down; but as surely as you see that red light in the west, so surely the day is sinking to its close. And

so it will be with her. Yet the doctor says a warmer air might possibly prolong her life ; and he charged me, as I valued that life, to get her off out of the country without delay."

"What climate did he recommend?"

"I think he called it Madeira."

"You talk of impossibilities, Agnes. I have not the means."

"Means? What should hinder? What should hinder but that you should work for her? She is richly worth it, sir."

"I know her worth as well as you can, Agnes; but I tell you again, it is impossible!"

"If I mistake not," continued the unrelenting woman, "you were compelled by law to allow her something, even if she had not been your wife. But, sir, there is a higher law than this.—There is the law of love. Oh that I was but young as you, and clever as they say you are; I would work night and day, till my hands were worn to skeletons; I would leave no friend unsought, and no means untried but I would gain my point; and then I would place her where the sun was always shining, and the air was always mild and pure; and if at last she must die, it should be amongst flowers, and she should breathe her last upon a bosom whose happiness it would ever be, to think that nothing had been denied her that was necessary for her comfort or her peace."

"Do you think she would go to Madeira, if we had the means?"

"I think she would do her best to live, for the sake of the child."

"Ah! Agnes, if I could do as you say?"

"Could!" exclaimed Agnes, "I would do it; nothing

on earth should hinder me. Oh, sir ! if you did but know the power of love ? As I said before, if I had but your head, and your hands, I would show you what love could do."

While Agnes uttered these words, Louis sunk into a chair, and at the same time allowed his thoughts to be absorbed by a profound reverie, not to be interrupted by the many after-remarks which Agnes thought herself entitled to make. At last, starting from the attitude in which he had remained for a long time, with his eyes fixed upon the ceiling of the room, he hurried into the studio, where the crumbling fragments of those vast designs, which had occupied his more ambitious moments, lay scattered in frightful and ruinous disorder all around the room. But if the neglected works of his hand presented so hopeless and melancholy a picture, what was to be expected from that smaller portion of his establishment devoted to the records of what his mind had but faintly conceived ? although for the full and entire completion of many of these shadowy conceptions, his promise had already gone forth, in consequence of which, expectations were awaiting the arrival of the finished performance in many distant parts of the country, as well as in the immediate neighbourhood of his home.

Every genius, and especially every idle and procrastinating genius, knows with how little relish we return to the execution of neglected or cast-off designs ; especially when the pressure of degrading or adverse circumstances renders their execution a work of necessity, rather than of choice. Opening a desk, which indeed was scarcely capable of being shut, on account of the number of loose and crumpled papers with which it was more than filled ; the young Sculptor began to take out one after another ;

but at the same time to cast them aside with a look and a movement of absolute disgust. Not one of these papers, whether it presented the faint outline of a design, or merely the written memorial of a promise, appeared to afford him the slightest pleasure; and it is more than probable that his contemplated effort would have ended in a momentary vision, had not the appearance of a stranger just then announced, put an end to these disagreeable subjects of reflection, by introducing one much more congenial to his taste, simply from the fact of its being new.

Lord M—— who appeared at this auspicious moment, was a young man of immense property, who had recently lost his wife, the mother of an infant child, who in the course of a few weeks followed its parent to the tomb. He had heard much of the fame of the young sculptor, and he had now sought him out, for the express purpose of engaging him to design and execute a monument to the memory of his departed wife.

Nothing could have been more in accordance with the wishes of Louis at this moment, and eagerly catching the idea, the intelligence of his whole mind was instantly pictured in his countenance, with so much light and life, that the young nobleman delighted with having found an artist who could really comprehend his meaning, was led into a more lengthened and feeling description of the character and appearance of his lost wife, than he could have believed himself capable of being betrayed into, in the presence of a stranger; and it so happened that the beauty upon which he expatiated, appeared to Louis to be of a kind exactly resembling that of Magdalen.

Full of this new idea, and really in earnest in what he was about to undertake, Louis was unusually silent and

absorbed in the presence of his wife that day ; until accidentally catching a glimpse of her figure as she sate with her child asleep in her arms, he started from his seat, exclaiming in a frenzy of delight, " I have it now, Magdalen. Sit there, sit still, and I will accomplish a work that will startle the world."

Magdalen looked up, and smiled. She too was delighted with anything that might win back her husband's affection for an art, which for her father's sake she had early learned to venerate and love. But when Louis farther opened to her his plans for realizing a sum of money sufficient for removing her to a warmer climate, she looked up no longer, but drooping her head over her sleeping child, said with a deep sigh, " Ah, Louis, it is too late !"

" I will not believe it !" exclaimed Louis. " Agnes is right when she says that nothing is too great for the power of love to accomplish ; and I will prove to you at last, Magdalen, that I have loved you, though you are sometimes inclined to doubt it. But tell me, have you strength, have you patience, to be my model ?"

" I have patience," replied Magdalen ; " but I doubt my strength. However, I will try. You can but work as long as it lasts."

Accordingly all arrangements were made, and Louis, with that feverish excitement which characterized all the movements into which he threw his hopes of success, began what was indeed a beautiful design, though much indebted to the perfect symmetry, and the classic elegance, of the figure of his patient wife, who devoted herself to the work of silent endurance with as much earnestness and assiduity, as that with which he pursued the more active portion of the task which fell to his share.

Not many weeks, however, had elapsed, before Louis grew tired, declaring that he must have a day of relaxation to enable him to proceed with success, and he agreed to join a party of young artists on an excursion into the country. From this excursion he returned with less relish for his work than before. His spirits appeared depressed, his brow was dark and heavy, and his thoughts appeared to be wandering to other subjects. Stimulus he declared was the only thing he wanted, and that being always at hand, he had recourse to it, drinking more and more each day, until at last he became wholly incapacitated, and laid aside his design, as he had often done before, to be remembered only as the subject of vain-glorious boasting, when enjoying the evening's carousal amongst companions of the same class with himself.

How long this state of affairs might have continued, it is impossible to say, had not that crisis arrived, which, to all who neglect their only means of pecuniary subsistence, is sooner or later inevitable. It became no longer a secret that Louis Montreville was in difficulties. His friends had predicted it long, and his enemies only wondered how he had continued to live from day to day. One resource alone remained to him. It was to make an entire surrender of the property which had belonged to the father of Magdalen, not only of the house and premises, but of the works of art, which the elder sculptor had been years in collecting. In order to the farther pursuit of his art, Louis made arrangements for still occupying the premises as a tenant; and now he again determined, and, kneeling at her feet again, he solemnly pledged himself to his wife, that henceforth he would renounce his besetting sin, and labour for her with his head and hands, as no man had ever laboured for his wife before.

It is remarkable, however, that persons of fickle and sanguine temperament, though having failed a thousand times, will still continue to believe themselves; and what is rather hard upon their friends, they generally feel as much hurt by any want of faith in their promises, as if such promises had never been broken. In the present instance, Louis Montreville scrupled not to accuse his wife of coldness, and injustice; and, worse than all, of being indifferent to that grand reformation of character which he protested again and again should be effected; while she in her turn, more justly hurt by his accusations, quietly replied, "I only wish I might live to see it."

"Live!" exclaimed Louis, "you must live, Magdalen. Indeed, I cannot see that you are so ill as you suppose. Come, dearest," said he, "you shall be my own Magdalen once more; but you must sit for me again, as you used to do, or I shall never be able to finish the work that is to be the means of transporting you to Madeira."

With the utmost composure Magdalen took her seat again with the child in her arms, and, although the weather was now cold and wintry, she submitted without hesitation or murmur to be dressed in a loose drapery, the folds of which Louis was soon busily employed in copying. Indeed so intent and so earnest was he in this great undertaking, which was at once to redeem his own character, and save the life of his wife, that he could not perceive the shivering chill which was gradually creeping over her whole frame. At last the trembling of the mother awoke the child; but even then Louis requested that it might be removed, and that Magdalen would keep the folds of her dress exactly as they were, at least for one hour longer.

Without a word of remonstrance Magdalen endea-

voured to compose herself again, though her teeth now chattered as if an ague-fit was upon her.

"What can be the matter with you?" exclaimed Louis stirring up the embers of a low fire, at the other end of the apartment. "I do not feel the room at all cold."

"Perhaps," said Magdalen, "you are better clothed than I am; besides which, you know I fancied I was not very well before I began."

"You fancy many things now, Magdalen. I wish you would try to think yourself in better health, and then I feel sure you would be so. Look at the many inducements you have for living; and do try, for my sake, and for the sake of the child, to rouse yourself."

If ever in her whole life the goaded spirit of Magdalen had risen to the height of indignation, it was now, when with flashing eyes she looked up into her husband's face; while, as if every drop of blood which that chilling occupation had locked within her heart, came burning back, and diffused itself in momentary crimson all over her brow and cheek. It was but a transient ebullition of feeling, however, and as the tide ebbed back again, to leave her faltering lips more pale, she longed to throw her arms around her husband's neck, and, weeping on his bosom like a child, to ask, where she might more appropriately have offered, forgiveness.

But Louis, whose mind was filled, almost exclusively, with one idea, had resumed his work. The subject of the conversation with him had passed away; and Magdalen never had been one to intrude upon the thoughts or occupations of others with any mention of herself.

"Go on, Louis," she said, as her husband seated himself; "I feel a little warmer now, and you had better work while you can."

"That was just my idea," said Louis coolly, "or I would not have troubled you."

And while he plied his busy fingers, with his eye intent upon his work, now advancing, and now retreating, in order to take a more general view of the whole, studying the developement of each particular muscle, calculating the distance of every relative part, observing how greater fulness must be brought out here, how this must be elevated, and that depressed; and referring, with the precision of an anatomist, to that mute figure seated in an attitude of repose, while a restless fever burned within her; he saw not, or understood not, that a wild expression foreign to her nature was flashing from her eyes, while an unwonted propensity to break the silence of his studies occasionally forced from her lips the utterance of some incoherent expression; when, smiling at her own folly, she folded her arms, and promised to be still, quite still again.

"You are not angry with me, Louis, dear, are you?" said she with that look of guileless and fearless simplicity which had characterized her happier hours.

"No," replied Louis, "I am not angry yet; but I certainly shall be, if you do not take more pains to keep the folds on the left side unruffled."

"Ah! Louis, it is there that the mischief lies. It is all the beating of my heart. If you could still the tumult there, I should indeed be a different creature."

How can I still it, Magdalen? I cannot love you better than I do."

"Thank you, dear Louis. Thank you a thousand, thousand times for loving such a poor dull worthless creature as I am. And if I should never live to speak

to you on this subject again, let me here thank you from my inmost soul, for the life of toil and of self-denial you are leading for my sake. But that I know it to be a wholesome and almost necessary restraint, I could not bear to see you labouring as you do."

"How do you mean by wholesome, Magdalen? you would not wish me to live always in this abstemious way, would you?"

"Not simply for my sake, certainly; but for your own, and for the sake of the poor child who will soon be left to you alone. Oh! now! if you would promise me one thing, Louis, I would sit so still all day, and all night too, until my life had silently ebbed away, and I had become like the cold and senseless form you are copying."

"What is that, dear Magdalen?"

"That by the time our boy shall have begun to think and act for himself, you will adopt this system of abstinence, not only for the sake of his temporal, but his eternal happiness."

"Now, Magdalen, it is my turn to think you unreasonable. It is always bad policy to ask too much. I would not promise this to the best friend I had in the world.

"Those words sound cold, Louis. If you have a better friend, I am sure you have none truer than myself."

"I beg your pardon. I forgot to whom I was speaking. But, to tell the truth, I was thinking of this fall in the drapery, whether it ought to be so." And Louis retreated, and looked again; and then again retreated, to see the effect of what he had just done.

When very intent upon anything which interested him, it was extremely difficult for Louis Montreville to give his attention to any other subject, especially one which must necessarily put a stop to occupations which he regarded for the moment as all-important. Thus, while the most indifferent observer would have seen the fatal risk to which he was subjecting his wife, the paramount idea in his mind being the essential service he was about to render her by the steady and successful pursuit of his art, he could not give his mind to entertain a thought of the possibility there was, that his success might be rendered unavailable by the very means he was adopting to ensure it.

There is a point, however, beyond which, even if human patience could endure, human strength must fail; and at this point poor Magdalen had arrived, when she meekly implored her husband to set her at liberty for that day at least, promising that she would do better if possible on the morrow.

When that morrow came, Magdalen was tossing on a restless couch, the victim of a burning fever; and against such a crisis it was, that Agnes had been especially warned. "The least shock, the least cold, or the least fever," said the doctor, "will just produce that acceleration of disease, which her constitution has not power to withstand, and consumption will follow."

These words were but too true; and, though partially recovered after the first attack, Magdalen never, during the whole winter, resumed her accustomed place in the family; nor, though often solicited by her husband, could she hold the child so long in her arms as to sit for his model again.

Louis could not understand this. He could not see

why, when her eyes were so bright, her cheeks so flushed, and her whole appearance so animated and brilliant, she could not assist him sometimes in the great work he had undertaken purely for her sake. Had he noticed the chill pale look she wore in the early part of the day, he might perhaps have been more easily convinced of the actual progress of her disease; but the fact was, he had become increasingly absorbed in his one great object, increasingly pleased with his own industry and perseverance, and, above all, increasingly confident of success.

Never before had the young Sculptor worked with such brilliant expectations as now. Never before had he really taxed the extent of his own genius. Notwithstanding all his fickleness and frivolity on other subjects, he had beneath this superficial surface of character a deep passion for his art, and this passion was now growing into actual form, and showing itself forth in the grace and symmetry of a design, as beautiful as it was true to nature and to life.

How little is understood of the sculptor's art, when its profound ideality is overlooked! It is this which renders it incomprehensible, and sometimes unattractive to the uninitiated multitude, who gaze, and wonder why the liveliness of colour should not be added to its reality. It is this which renders the art so absorbing, so all-sufficient in itself, to those who bury their souls in its deep mysteries; for theirs is indeed a world into which no vulgar mind can penetrate. The forms of beauty amongst which the imagination of the painter revels, assume an outline and a character in the first commencement of his work; but the sculptor fixes his rapt gaze upon that which no other eye can possibly behold, and

not until the last stroke of his chisel, can the connoisseur pronounce with certainty upon its success.

Louis Montreville would from the first have found stimulus enough in his art to have supplied the craving of his restless and impatient mind, had he applied himself to it with the steady perseverance with which he laboured now ; yet one great secret of this perseverance unquestionably was, that he wholly abstained from that more dangerous stimulus which had hitherto been the bane of his life. Not that he regarded himself under any moral obligation to do so ; but he had made a sort of vow to himself, that he would join no society, enjoy no relaxation, nor indulge himself in any gratification of this nature, until his great work should be completed, and Magdalen should reward him by acknowledging that he had indeed practised both industry and self-denial for her sake.

In this manner the long winter passed over, and the Sculptor relaxed not from his work. The spring came, and Magdalen again revived, for her mind was more at rest, and though she still felt no confidence in her husband's stability, so many days and weeks glided on, without any deviation on his part, that she must have been ungrateful and insensible indeed, had she not rejoiced in the welcome change. She began, too, to think sometimes that perhaps she might live—perhaps she might be happy again ; and oh how sweet then was the thought of renovated nature, of the song of the birds, and the springing of fresh flowers ; but especially if the time when Louis had promised, that he would go with her to a distant land, where a soft and genial climate would restore her wasted strength.

Any one but herself, and he who ought to have

watched her more carefully, might have known that these hopes were delusive, and she knew it too ; yet there were times when her wishes were too strong for her judgment, and when fever supplied an energy which she mistook for amended health. It was the part of Agnes to check this exuberance of hope, simply by her evident want of participation in its pleasing pictures. Beyond this she dared not venture, lest the reaction of a mind so sensitive as Magdalen's, should produce some fearful crisis such as that which had been the occasion of her father's sudden death.

And thus the summer months, too, passed away, and Louis announced his work as being so nearly completed, that as the time was now approaching when that change must be made, if made at all, upon which he believed the life of Magdalen to be depending, he determined to appeal at once to the kind feelings of Lord M——, to state to him the situation of his family, the prospects he entertained for the restoration of his wife, and, trusting to his well-known liberality, to ask an advance of the sum of money stipulated in their agreement, or at least as much of it as might enable him to place his wife beyond the chilling influence of the autumnal atmosphere of her native land.

For this purpose, he undertook a journey to the north of England, where the residence of Lord M—— was situated ; and a melancholy mockery it was, to see him take leave of Magdalen, promising to come back with glad tidings that would cheer her heart, and urging her in the mean time to direct Agnes in the different preparations necessary for her journey.

Yet in all this Louis was perfectly sincere. The change in Magdalen's state of health having been so

gradual as scarcely to be perceived by any but a close observer. Besides which, he was one of those, and they are not few in number, who know so little about illness in general, as to suppose that where the spirits are cheerful, the cheek rosy, and the eye bright, there cannot be much amiss with the bodily functions.

"And do you really think, Agnes," said Magdalen to her faithful attendant, "that I shall not live to benefit by this change of air, about which we talk so much?"

"You must not ask me that question," replied Agnes, "unless you wish to hear what no one else will tell you."

"What is that, Agnes? I always wish to hear the truth."

"But how am I to make you believe it is the truth?"

"Why, I confess it seems very strange that I should not know best myself in what state I really am. You must acknowledge I have been better during the last fortnight. And, O Agnes! if I should recover—if I should ever live to reward poor Louis for his patience and his self-denial!"

"Don't think of that, dearest. Patience and self-denial have their own reward."

"But why should I not think of it? Why should I not picture to myself that bright blue sky, that sunshine that glows in my imagination, those flowers that never fade, and those soft sweet airs that even I could breathe, and that would fan this burning brow, and bring back to my eyelids the gentle sleep of a young child? Why, Agnes, should I not think of these things, when the gloom of this great city is around me, and I pant for breath, and lie awake all night, listening to the heavy tumult of the vast multitudes, not one of whom would care if they were trampling on my grave? It is something to think of,

even if I should die in that far-off land ; but, O Agnes ! if I should live !”

“ You will live, dear child, but it will not be there, nor here. If you must think of cloudless skies, and gentle airs, and flowers that never fade, let it be of the skies, and the airs, and the flowers of heaven, for there only will you ever enjoy them.”

“ But I am not fit for heaven, Agnes ; and I would fain live a little longer to think of that, too, for I fear—I greatly fear, I have been seeking my heaven upon earth.”

“ Let death come when it will, you cannot say that you have been called away unwarned. This sick bed, this darkened chamber, these restless nights, your poor thin fingers, your burning cheeks, and throbbing pulse, are all warnings that it is time—high time to prepare.”

“ You terrify me, Agnes. I dare not think of that deep cold grave in which I saw my mother laid. I would cling to you, dear Agnes, to Louis, and my child ; I would open my heart afresh to all your tenderness ; I would draw you closer to my bosom, by my gratitude and love. And then I am so young : why, Agnes, I am not three-and-twenty yet. There is much to be done, and still more to be enjoyed, before I shall reach the natural limit of human existence.”

“ God does not calculate, as we do, the years that we have lived, or might live. He has his own wise purposes in what he does, and it is for us to submit.”

In this manner Agnes reasoned, according to her knowledge, with one whose warm and vivid feelings would have been more easily directed through the medium of her imagination, and might possibly have been thus led to contemplate those eternal and momentous truths whose

full and clear developement was becoming hourly more important to her peace and safety ; while, with such a companion, presenting to her the cold and naked fact of her approaching death, she shrunk back appalled from a prospect which had seldom been presented to her mind in any but repulsive colours.

While Agnes and her mistress pursued this conversation, Louis was speeding on his journey, full of hope and exultation, pleased with the new scenes which presented themselves, and still more pleased with the reception which welcomed him as an honoured guest at the residence of Lord M——, in the north of England. Here it would have been difficult for Louis, had he waited many days, to have laid before his patron the object of his journey, so entirely was he treated as a gentleman, and an equal ; but, happily for that object, his impetuous nature prompted him to speak fully and freely on the subject in the first private interview to which he was invited.

His request to the good-natured nobleman was readily complied with, and Louis might have hastened home with the glad tidings before Magdalen had had time to feel his absence long ; but of all the temptations which could have been placed in his way, that of filling a place in distinguished society, of sharing on familiar and friendly terms the luxuries of a splendid mansion, and of mixing on such terms with men of talent, and lovers of the fine arts, was that which Louis was least able to resist. Besides which his great object being served, his merit, as he thought, complete, he had no longer need of self-denial, and so far as a regard for his character and dignity would permit, he plunged into every indulgence, not excepting that which had been the bane of his life.

Still, however, Louis was not so reckless as to commit himself to any great excess ; nor, in a situation so entirely suited to his taste, did he feel the actual need of so much excitement, to enliven and invigorate his spirits, as when harassed with the low cares and pressing avocations of his home. Thus he only launched, as it were, once more upon a sea of danger, steering warily at first, and keeping steadily in view the boundary-line, beyond which it would have been folly and disgrace to go.

But the time came at last, when, from the arrival of different members of Lord M——'s family, and other circumstances which Louis was not slow to perceive, it became inexpedient for his patron to urge his longer stay. He, therefore, waited not to bring upon himself the mortification of having remained too long, but with a grace and a dignity, which he well knew how to assume, took leave of Lord M——, without any one of his household suspecting the real nature of those pressing circumstances which had brought so lively and delightful a companion within their circle.

If the temptation of his patron's hospitable board had been difficult for Louis to resist, how much more so, was that of being suddenly and entirely deprived of all the enjoyments in which he was naturally prone to revel, in being driven out from that brilliant scene, to become an ordinary wayfaring man upon a public road, the companion of those who travelled for their trade, or whose trade enabled them to travel—and with his purse, for him so full, the weather as it happened then both dull and rainy, and that sad home, and sickly wife, and humble means of living, at the end of his dull journey !

To all these circumstances Louis had been made most feelingly alive, by the increased pelting of the rain, just

as the vehicle, in which he occupied an outside place, stopped at one of those large inns, situated on the great road from London to the north. The season for grouse-shooting had commenced, and this inn being one of the head-quarters for sportsmen at that time of the year, Louis was amusing himself with scanning the different figures of these idlers of the autumn, in all their varieties of costume, when the countenance of an old friend presented itself to his view, and in another instant he was warming himself at a cheerful fire, while his friend was urging him to stay for one day at least, to share his sport amongst the moors.

Louis thought of his wife, of her prolonged expectations, and, as he feared, her increased feebleness, both of which had been described to him in a letter from Agnes. And the fact of the servant having to write this letter, owing to the inability of her mistress, had startled him, for a moment, from his accustomed blindness to her actual state.

“Still it cannot possibly be of any consequence,” said he, while reasoning to himself, “whether I reach home to-morrow, or the next day. I am sure I have worked hard enough to merit this relaxation; and besides, I take such good tidings with me, that Magdalen must be better, whether she thinks herself so or not.”

With these thoughts crowding upon his mind, he looked out from the dim window of that cheerful room. The lamps of the heavy coach were just lighted, the guard had sounded his horn for the passengers, who slowly resumed their miserable places on the roof, under the slender canopy of a few dripping umbrellas, while tarpawling and mackintosh were in requisition to the utmost limit of their stretch, to cover the already soaked habili-

ments of those, who thus prepared themselves for another night and day of patient endurance.

It was altogether an unattractive spectacle. "I will not go," said Louis, and he hastened out to tell the coachman to drive on without him.

And now—but it may easily be supposed, how that day, and another, and another passed, where there was no restraint, no character to lose; with the means of unbounded gratification perpetually at hand. Here, too, no letter from his melancholy home could reach him, and Louis said each morning when awaking from his feverish sleep, "I dare say Magdalen is better. I will not return to-day." At last, however, whether sated by excess, or roused into effort by the departure of his friend, he did prepare himself for undertaking the remainder of his journey home; but it was this time with broken health and sinking spirits, accompanied with a nervous apprehension, not unusual under such circumstances, that some calamity was impending over him, or some fearful tidings awaiting his return.

Those who had seen the young Sculptor set off on that journey, would scarcely have recognized in him the same individual who lifted with trembling fingers the knocker of his own door.

"Is all well?" said Louis, when the door was opened to him by a little girl, employed only when extra-assistance was required in the family.

"Much the same, I believe, sir;" was the quiet reply; and Louis felt that moment as if a mountain had been removed from his heart.

"Mamma is asleep," said the little child, who met his father in the passage, and who had been studiously taught by Agnes to say 'hush!' and to lift its rosy finger as a

signal that no noise was to be made. "Mamma sleeps so long," it continued; and Louis felt another fearful misgiving—another heart-quake, as he questioned what that sleep could mean.

"Your mistress," said he to the girl when he had called her back,—*"is—is"*—he could proceed no further.

"Is much the same, sir," was again answered; and Louis was again relieved from a suspicion which brought with it too much of agony to be long endured.

"Mamma wants you," said the child, as it watched him adjusting his hair, and arranging his dress before a glass, where the glimpse he caught of his altered appearance, convinced him that the scrutinizing eye of affection would not be long before it detected the nature and the cause of his prolonged absence from home.

"Mamma shall see me now," said he at last, when all had been done which his ingenuity could suggest, to restore the proper look and character of the outward man; while, snatching the child in his arms, he added, "I have good news to tell mamma; you shall come with me, and see how sweetly she will smile."

It was a sort of relief to the troubled mind of Louis, once more to clasp his child to his bosom; but as its cherub cheek was pressed to his, a sudden thrill of compunctious feeling sent unbidden tears into his eyes, to think what he might have been to that sweet child, and its sweeter mother.

"But I have glad tidings to tell her," he said again; though, not until this fact had been repeated many times, could he force himself into the presence of that mother, knowing, as he did, the just cause she had to meet him with reproach instead of welcome.

"Hush, hush!" said a faint voice as he opened the

door of the chamber ; and the child, accustomed to the caution, again lifted up its little finger, and repeated the word.

“ I know,” said Louis as Agnes turned towards him a look, at once of anguish and reproach, “ that she sleeps ; but I have brought glad tidings, and I must awake her to hear them.”

“ Hush !” said Agnes again ; but this time she beckoned him to come nearer, while with one hand she endeavoured to direct his attention to the helpless burden she was supporting by the other.

“ Look there !” she said, as he drew near. “ Look, there !” she repeated with clenched teeth, and in a sharp whisper, which seemed to cut a new passage to his brain.

Louis looked as he was directed, for the face of his wife was turned towards the wall, as she lay stretched on a low couch, which appeared to have been drawn to the window, as if for the benefit of more air. Louis looked as he was directed, and beheld—no, it was not sleep, for the eyes were open. It was not death, for there was breath and motion. But, oh ! that senseless look—that slight convulsive stir ! It was worse than if all had been over. A sudden frenzy seized the wretched man. He kissed her marble brow, already cold and damp, he clasped her powerless hand, he fell upon her bosom ; but there was no return—no, not the faintest whisper of a sigh, the slightest dawning of a smile, in answer to the tide of tenderness which his impassioned lips were now pouring into her dull and senseless ear.

“ Magdalen ! my own Magdalen ! you must hear me !” he cried—“ Hear me in mercy, if not in love !” and he actually stooped down, until his cheek touched

hers, and thus repeated her name, so wildly, and so loudly, that, had one spark of consciousness remained, he must have roused it into life. But, no ; that fitful and laborious breathing went on just the same, with intervals of longer space ; those half-closed eyes stirred not, for they beheld no more the beauty on which they had so often dwelt ; and those attenuated lips, now drawn back from the white and prominent teeth—never, never more would they give utterance to words of welcome, or of love.

The husband and the father had time to exist through a life of feeling, before the last of those faint breathings died upon his ear—before the last convulsive movement of the hand startled him for a single second with a lightning flash of hope, and then harrowed up his soul by a slight but strange distortion of that beautiful and perfect form, whose every lineament was wrought in with the loveliest creations of his genius. He had time to live through a life of feeling, as he stood there, watching the work of death, and knowing that the master-stroke of destruction had been his own. He had time, for who shall set bounds to the speed of thought, even to call up sweet remembrances of the far-off past—of the dreams—nay, more, of the realities of early love ; and these he contrasted with the present scene. Nor was this all. He had time to go on, and on, into the dark and desolate future through which he had to tread alone. He had time to see, as if in a fierce and blazing light, the cruelty and the guilt of his own conduct. He had time for everything but repentance. That found no place in his bosom ; for its nature is to soften and to heal, and his grief was wild and raving.

How different was the conduct of Agnes. She had

done her humble part, to the best of her knowledge and her judgment. She had foreseen the event. She had watched every symptom of decay in the flower which had both bloomed and faded under her care; and although she knew that in the aggregate of duty many things had been left undone, such occasional deficiencies had been made up by the faithfulness and the intensity of her love. Thus she was calm, for what anguish had this hour for her beyond the many she had lived through of previous expectation drawing to one certain close? She was calm, because she had been true; and therefore, after sitting for a long time in motionless silence beside the couch, with her eyes riveted upon the lifeless form, she rose with dignity and composure to commence the solemn task of preparation for the grave, first leading the wretched husband to a distant apartment, in order that the chamber of the dead might be silent and secure.

But who shall describe the long dark days which followed, each laden with its peculiar burden of sorrow and remorse? Who shall dare to look into the mind of that miserable man, as he paced from room to room, literally seeking rest, and finding none; while sometimes he would throw himself upon his knees beside the bier, on which that lifeless form was laid, and, giving utterance to his inmost thoughts, would audibly, and in impassioned language, implore her forgiveness of the past, while he promised—and, oh! how deeply and solemnly did he pledge himself to a stricter, holier life, for the future.

On one occasion especially, taking his child in his arms, and kneeling down as he had often done before, he uttered, in the presence of Agnes, a fervent and impassioned vow, that, for the sake of that dear charge, and in remembrance of a request his wife had made, he not only

never would be guilty of excess again, but no sooner should the child have attained to a knowledge of good and evil, than he would renounce altogether, and for ever, the habit of using, even moderately, what he had so often, to the injury of his temporal and eternal interests, abused.

And so it was, that when weeks, nay, even months, had passed over, this vow was not broken. With this inviolate, and with the burden of grief upon his heart, the Sculptor became an altered man—so altered, that the few friends he had left, began to augur hopeful things, and to pronounce again that he would become a distinguished and wealthy man. Nor was this hope without foundation, for his fame was now spreading far and wide. His one great work, though fruitless as related to the immediate object he had had in view, was productive of a rich harvest of renown; and before the marble had received the last stroke of his chisel, it had already become an object of attraction, not only to his friends, but to all who obtained access to his studio.

For the fame of a distinguished sculptor, the soul of Louis Montreville had thirsted almost since the days of his childhood; and now that the object of his ambition was attained, what was it to him! And where was the delight it brought! Dark—dark, and solitary to him was that old gallery, where he now paced alone, stripped as it was of all its noblest and finest ornaments, to supply the necessities his recklessness had brought upon him; but most of all, its desolation told upon his heart in the loss of that one being, who used to sit there at her father's feet, pouring forth the music of her own full heart, through the poetic language of other lands.

No object was now left as a stimulus for Louis to

work, for he found, as all have ever felt, and all must ever feel, that fame was not enough. He wanted the kind welcome, the sweet approving smile, the inspiration of the living beauty ever at his side; and when critics and connoisseurs flocked in, and poured their flattering praises on his ear, he would sometimes turn away, to dash the unmanly tear-drop from his eye; while, often, as the tide of adulation swelled, he was tempted to exclaim, "Well may that work be worthy of your praise, when it cost the wife of my bosom her precious life!"

Yet, strange to say, after all that had passed, there was not amongst his acquaintance a truer or kinder friend than old Agnes. It seemed as if her indignant spirit was softened and smoothed down, by some secret influence which death had wrought upon it; and so great was the change in her manner, so studious the care with which she anticipated all her master's wants and wishes, that he not only observed, but felt it; and one day, when they were alone, he ventured to ask her how it was, that now, when he alone was left to serve—he who had proved himself in every respect so little worthy—she could serve him so faithfully and kindly?

"It was her dying request," replied Agnes, "that I should do so. She said there would be no one else, when she was gone, to do you any little service; and if there was, none understood so well as I did what you liked, and to what you had been accustomed."

"Did she say this of me, Agnes, when I was forgetting her on her death-bed?"

"Yes, sweet soul, she did: and never breathed a murmuring word against you all the time."

"But you should have written to me, Agnes. You should have sent to me express."



G. A. Pearson

'Good Tidings'

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"I did write, sir, again and again; but no answer came, and we thought you must have left the place."

"Ah! so it was. I had forgotten. But, Agnes, you must tell me more, for I feel as if I could bear it now. You must tell me what she said about my intemperance—my guilt."

"She said, often and often, poor dear creature, and sometimes, when she thought I was asleep, she made it the subject of her prayers, that she considered that one besetment as the bane of your happiness—the ruin of your soul! 'But I have been to blame,' she would add, 'as well as he. I have not, until now, seen clearly how this temptation should have been met. I have urged him, she said, to give up everything of this description for the sake of the child, so soon as it shall be able to distinguish good from evil; but he must do this before, he must do it now, if he would escape the gulf into which he is sinking.'"

"Did she say that, Agnes?"

"She did. And often in the still night she would call to me with that soft angel-voice of hers, to come and hear again the solemn charge, which, through me, she fain would lay upon your soul. And then she would speak of you—oh, with such tenderness! and charge me, as I loved her memory, to be all I could be, both to the child and you. 'Your thoughts,' she would add, 'are not wrapped up in him as mine have been; and if they were, your hand perhaps is not so gentle. You cannot raise the dark hair from his aching brow, or cool the burning of his temples with your kiss; but you can meet him kindly, and see that his fireside looks cheerful, and place his chair for his return, his slippers on the hearth,'—and thus she would go on, when the fever was upon her,

until, what with the look of those beautiful eyes, the sweetness of her smile, and the feeling, quicker than thought, with which she passed on from one thing to another, all centering either in you, or the child, one would have thought she had already put off her mortality, and had become in reality an angel of light."

"And she spoke often of the child?"

"Yes; but not so often as of you. 'My darling boy,' she said, 'you will cherish for his own sake, as well as mine,' and she made me promise, which indeed I was nothing loath to do, that I would never leave him while I live; 'but of his father,' she said, 'you have sometimes spoken harshly, and therefore I urge upon you the more that you will never do so again, remembering, whenever you are tempted for the future, that if you act or speak unkindly to him, you are at the same time wounding the spirit of one, who loved him better than her own life.'"

"And now, sir, if one in my situation may venture to speak on such a subject, I would ask when it is your intention to commence that way of life which she, who both knew and loved you so well, implored me on her death-bed, that I would urge upon you as the only way of safety for one tempted as you have been, and no doubt will be again."

"No, Agnes, there you are mistaken. I feel no inclination now. The company, the excitement which once were my delight, are a weariness, a burden to me now."

"Human nature, sir, however it may be circumstanced, is human nature still; and it sometimes happens, that the safer we feel ourselves, the greater is our danger. Besides which, if you begin now, while under no temptation, the trial will be easier than it can be after temptation has begun."

"But, Agnes, I have bound myself by that awful vow. Did you not hear me when I knelt beside her coffin?"

"I did, but he who enters in upon the broad way of destruction, saying, 'I will go so far, and no farther,' is in a very different position from him who turns aside, and will not enter in. Besides which, it is not I who urge it. It is that loved and lost one, who appeals to you again through me. Why then—oh, why will you not listen?"

"It is so trifling a request. Had she asked of me a life of self-denial, the sacrifice of every earthly good—had she consigned me to poverty, or labour, or abject humiliation for her sake, it would not have been too much; but a trifle like this—why, it would be a mockery to her memory!"

"The more trifling, the more easy; and I should have thought that the very time and manner in which the request was made, would have been enough from one who would—nay, I might almost say, who did lay down her life for you."

"But I cannot do it, Agnes."

"Why not?"

"My health, both of mind and body, requires that I should have some stimulus."

"Then how will you manage in the course of two or three years, when, as you yourself have promised, you will give it up for ever. O sir! begin now, begin before your soul becomes polluted again, begin while you have strength to do so; begin while this awful warning is fresh upon your soul, or how do you know that God will spare you, or prolong his mercy till that future day?"

"I tell you, Agnes, again, it is impossible for me now to fall into excess. I absolutely loathe it."

"Then I too must go back to the same story, and tell

you again, that for that very reason, now is your time to begin, by abstaining altogether. To-day you are able to do so ; to-morrow you may not."

"But my vow is, that I will go no farther than her pure spirit would approve."

"That vow—what is it ? A cobweb against a whirlwind ! Have I not heard such vows before, and seen them broken ? Yes, when health, and wealth, and fame, and happiness, and peace of conscience, all depended upon their being kept."

In this manner that old and faithful servant, her mind full even to overflowing, with the sacred charge which her beloved mistress had left upon her, ventured to deal with the master whom she still endeavoured to serve with as much appearance of reverence and esteem, as if those feelings had in reality been implanted in her mind.

It was but natural, however, that if the request of his dying wife had not sufficient influence upon the Sculptor to induce him to resign what he confessed would cost him no effort to give up, the arguments of his old domestic should prove altogether unavailing ; and chiefly from this cause, that he felt within himself so fortified, so determined against excess, that he believed it morally impossible he should break his vow.

And thus, through the long dull days of his solitary existence, the Sculptor lived on, without a motive for exertion, and consequently without energy—without excitement, and consequently sad. By degrees, however, his buoyant spirits began to resume their tone. He had health and youth in his favour, and his playful and happy child, the image of its mother inspired by his own vivacity, would often win him from the sullen mastery of

his own dull thoughts, to become himself a child in pastime; when, casting off the burden of his grief, he would echo back that merry laugh of infant gladness, until he almost wondered at the sound, to which he had once imagined it impossible that his lips would give utterance again.

Happy, happy would it have been for Louis Montreville, had this natural indulgence, this joyous pastime, this innocent laugh, been all the tendency he felt to resume the habits most congenial to his taste; but, alas! with reviving cheerfulness, there came so many early-formed associations, so many pleas for rousing himself once more into life and action, as he called the conduct and behaviour of other young men of his class, that before one year of his widowhood had passed over, he was again plunged in, and mixed up with the multitude; and again walked in the ordinary ways of worldly-minded and self-indulgent men.

To many—to most of these, the path they trod was safer than it was to Louis. They could, many of them, meet in social fellowship, and pledge the cheering wine-cup apparently unharmed; but he could not; and while his boon companions lured him on, while pleasure seemed to glow with a sort of charmed atmosphere around him, while men of respectability and talent, with their knowledge and their wit, beguiled him of the heavy burden of his secret thoughts, what wonder that he should fail to perceive the exact boundary between moderation and excess; or having once discovered himself to be on the wrong side of this line, what wonder that he should hurry on to absolute forgetfulness that there were such things as safety and danger, good and evil, in the world?

“It is but once, it is but twice,” he would say to Agnes, as the repetition of these excesses awoke her most serious

and faithful remonstrances ; until their number grew beyond all calculation ; until, instead of any distinct and separate acts to which a name or a place might have been assigned, the whole resolved itself into a mass of extravagance and folly—of wretchedness and crime.

And now Agnes saw that the end she had all along predicted was approaching, and that the more rapidly, because there was neither check nor attraction at home. She saw that her master's pecuniary resources must soon fail, and she began to calculate, and to husband her own scanty means, preparatory to taking the entire charge of that more than orphan child, from whom she was determined that nothing should separate her but death.

And the father of that child—the genius, the gay, the light-hearted being, whose very capabilities of enjoyment, undisciplined and unrestrained, had been the barrier to his real happiness ; the highly-gifted, the promising young Sculptor, whose fortune seemed at one time to be in his own hands—he, with threadbare coat, and crouching figure, and eye that looked askance from every countenance it met, was soon seen skulking through the byways of the city—a man unheard of in respectable society, except as his name alone was associated with one work of such surpassing merit, that the stranger who beheld and wondered at its beauty, would sometimes breathe a passing thought of curiosity about the unknown cause, why that name should not be farther blazoned on the lists of fame, concluding with charitable surmise, that death must have blighted the fair promise of a genius, which it seemed as if nothing else, in the common course of human events, would have had power to check in its glorious career.

Yes, and death indeed it was ; if it be death to feel no

more alive to those sweet influences which bring the wanderer back from the error of his ways—to listen no more to the language of remonstrance or reproof—to hope no more to regain the upward path, and to walk with safety there—nay, to desire no more to return, and be at peace with God.

Yet were there moments when even this lost wretched man could not “forget himself to stone,” when the picture of a young Italian girl, the smile of a rosy child, the notes of a long-remembered melody, would send across his soul such a thrill of intense and intolerable anguish, that, had there been one human bosom still open to receive him, he would have flown, with his guilt, his penitence, and his tears, to bury his torment there. Yes, he would have gone, to offer up on this altar the ashes of his crushed and blighted feelings, down into the lowest depths of human degradation, or far as the winds could carry the blessed tidings, that to him there still remained a friend. But, no. There is no real sympathy in the fellowship of guilt; and miserable as he was, and sometimes melted into more than woman’s tenderness, his habits and associations were exclusively with men and women of depraved and hardened natures, who, while they despised, were still willing to make him, so far as he was capable of being so, the tool of their base purposes—the victim of their cruelty and guile.

And was this the man on whom such tenderness had once been lavished? his crouching abject form, the very same round which fair arms had twined? his hair, those mean and meagre locks, the wreath of raven curls which she, the gentle one, would lift from off his brow of beauty, and gazing, lose herself in dreams of bliss? his voice, with all its altered tones, now broken into lan-

guage no one cares to hear,—oh, it was once a perfect melody to one, whose spirit lived in music, and breathed itself away in love!

Yes, and he remembers all this. He must remember it; for it is the just and inevitable curse of those who have been blest, and would not use their blessings as they ought, that they cannot, if they would, forget that the sweet waters of healing and refreshment, of which they might have partaken in their early life, must still constitute the flood in which their burning lips may bathe, but cannot drink. He remembers all this, and there are moments in which his hand is raised against the life which brings no joy to others, or to himself; but that hand is powerless now. He cannot grasp the weapon—he cannot actually resolve; he can only go and grovel as before, and drown his momentary anguish in unconsciousness again.

And where now is that sweet and happy child? He has grown into a youth of such rare beauty, that even the stranger, passing on his way, stops to look back, and see how carefully he guides the steps of the old matron by his side; while, bending with the weight of years, she lays her shrivelled hand upon his shoulder, and traces her accustomed way to an humble dwelling, one of an old and narrow street about to be thrown open to the march of busier feet than tread its dismal passage now. It was a lovely picture, too, and one which might well have arrested the painter's gaze, to see that strange contrast between youth and age—one, beautiful and fresh, and almost noble in its character and bearing; the other, worn and weak, with steps that trembled as if with the consciousness that earth was but a slippery hold for them.

Returning from these walks, which from the feebleness of Agnes were but of rare occurrence, it was the custom of the boy to place her in her chair, and then with his own hands to light their fire, and prepare their humble and often scanty meal; and, reluctant as the aged woman was, to be ministered unto, rather than to minister, from the weight of years, and the shock of many trials, she was now brought down to such a state of feebleness, that submission was her only choice.

Thus the kind-hearted boy repaid his aged parent, as he believed her to be, for all her faithfulness to him, and his; and what was more to be wondered at in one of his sex and years, he did this cheerfully—often looking up into the wrinkled face of his companion, with the very smile his mother wore, and with the vivacity of his other parent, turning into jest and drollery the various expedients to which he, and his supposed grandmother, had recourse, under the pressure of their many wants and slender means.

With his mother's beauty, the boy inherited her taste for music, and it so happened, that he had found the means of turning this talent to some account, by forming the acquaintance of one who permitted him to practise on his humble instrument. The genius of the father now developed itself in the son, though in a different manner; for music became to him like the food on which he lived; and he probably resigned himself to this passion the more entirely, that the faculties of his mind had never been called forth in any other way. He was in fact without education, and almost without thought; but music was to him a sense, and thousands and tens of thousands of new feelings and new associations began to crowd upon his mind, through this newly-opened channel.

It was on returning home from an evening spent in devotion to this, his only study, that the hitherto thoughtless boy had to prepare for the first affliction of his life. The voice which had always welcomed his return spoke not. The latch of the door was not stirred from within; the fire had died out in the little chamber, and there, stretched on the bed where her aged limbs had at last found rest, lay the lifeless form of his mother's nurse, and his. In the same moment, a sense of his own utter loneliness struck upon the heart of the affectionate boy, and, falling upon the senseless form, he wept, with the bitterness of an orphan, over his last and only friend.

Such were the feelings which the unremitting tenderness and care of old Agnes had inspired in her otherwise neglected charge, that no means by which a son could have done honour, under such circumstances, to the memory of a mother, were disregarded. A little hoarded money, a few pieces of ancient furniture, had been the property of Agnes, and these were all appropriated to the purpose of giving decent burial to her remains, which the boy himself, as chief-mourner, followed to their last home; and if the tears which fell from his bright eyes, as he stood beside the grave, unnoticed, unrecognized, unpitied, were any test of real feeling, there was more sorrow experienced for that poor aged woman, than for many of those, whose rank and titles herald their passage to the tomb.

And now the friendless boy was indeed alone in the wide world; but his spirit failed him not; for he was young, and having seldom known an ambitious hope, or a wish beyond his daily bread, he betook himself to the practice of his favourite art, and esteemed himself a

happy being, when, by the performance of some new melody, he could win the notice of the wealthy, or the fair, who would sometimes look down from their high windows, and smiling on the beautiful Italian boy, as all believed him to be, would at the same time cast a mite out of their abundance at his feet.

CHAP. IV.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

It is a popular, but mistaken notion, that friendship grows out of similarity of character. It arises, like love, out of circumstances, perhaps more than out of anything else—circumstances which bring together two individuals capable of feeling deeply, to exercise that feeling upon one subject, which is for the time a source of equal interest to both. But above all, friendship subsists, if it does not actually grow, out of the wants of our common nature, which in every individual has some defect, or rather some deficiency, which we eagerly seek to supply, and the friend who can assist us by supplying perpetually the thing we want, and who in her turn is in a state to receive the same assistance from us, has the best chance, not only of inspiring but of maintaining through all the vicissitudes of life, that faithfulness without which all friendship is but a name.

Mary and Martha, the two friends to which these observations particularly apply, were brought up from infancy in the same village. The former was the only child of the clergyman; the latter was the oldest of a large family, whose sole remaining parent aspired no higher than the cure of the various bodies, young and old, rich and poor, in the same extensive parish.

Mr. Churchill, the father of Mary, occupied an old-fashioned picturesque cottage adjacent to the church. Mr. Bowman, the father of Martha, lived in the principal street, or rather the only one of that straggling village, where his name, in large letters on the door, gave promise of present succour, and hope of future restoration, to all who sought the healing of his medicine, or the benefit of his skill.

From circumstance as well as situation, each of these young persons was necessarily surrounded by a different set of associations, which, operating from childhood until riper years, upon constitutions of mind and body most probably different in themselves, had produced in each a tendency of character as unlike as could well be found in two individuals of the same sex, both young, both amiable, and both affectionate and kind.

Mary, from the nature of her circumstances at home, had acquired a taste for reading and meditation, with a pensive turn of thought; while her unshared childhood, and comparatively unoccupied life, had rendered her, both as a member of society and of her father's household, less useful than ornamental—less practical than intelligent. Had her mother been a woman of sufficient energy to direct her daughter's education herself, it is probable that the foundation laid at a respectable boarding school might have been matured into something far more admirable under a mother's care; but just at the time when her talents required the most direction, and when her moral faculties began more fully to develop themselves, she was taken home to satisfy the ill-judged tenderness of a sickly mother, and left unoccupied to the full enjoyment of her own time, and her own means of finding instruction or amusement from any

source that might present itself to her fancy. Thus, as might have been anticipated from a mind like hers, a pensive melancholy became the complexion of the moral atmosphere in which she lived ; while the stillness of her father's cottage, the picturesque effect of its situation, the associations naturally arising out of its connection with the church and the church-yard, induced a habit of sentimental musing, which, like many other young ladies of the same class, Mary mistook for refinement of feeling, and poetic taste.

From all these circumstances, it was but natural that Mary's appearance should derive a peculiar character, in which the tone of her feelings might easily be read. More interesting than beautiful, she was still so gentle, graceful, and lady-like in all she said and did, that the general effect upon the stranger was almost as pleasing as if a higher style of beauty, with less of these accompaniments, had been her natural gift ; and thus while her conversation was by no means original or striking, it was at all times too easy, fluent, and well chosen to offend.

There could scarcely have entered the same room two girls, both pleasing, and yet more dissimilar than Mary and Martha in their manners and appearance. Manner, indeed, as generally understood, it had never been the aim of Martha to acquire. Too pretty to be overlooked, and too kind to be coarse, Martha had the art of pleasing by qualities peculiarly her own ; but she also possessed the power of displeasing in the same proportion ; for, to say the truth of Martha, she was sometimes, and on very particular occasions, a little pert. Her very countenance looked pert. Her bright black eyes, her short though finely-modelled nose, the mischievous play of her rosy

lips, and the obstinate curling of her dark and glossy hair, with the playful toss of a beautifully moulded head, all gave her the appearance of one who needed not that any one should take her part—of one who could fight her own battles, and take care of herself, and perhaps of others too.

That such women sometimes manage to please more than those of gentler temperament, and that they please the lordly sex, is a mystery only to be accounted for, by supposing that when characters of this description are *softened down*, the triumph is more flattering than where the original is more pliant, and more easily moulded to the will. It so happened, however, that while Martha had many admirers, few were so venturesome as to wish to trust their happiness entirely to her keeping; while she, on the other hand, not apparently unwilling to receive attentions, evinced no inclination to construe such attentions into the homage of the heart, but rather threw back, with a sort of playful recklessness, every advance that was made to her in the form of sentiment or tenderness. Even Mary, her most intimate and bosom friend, found little mercy at her hands, when complaining of the thousand little trials, disappointments, and perplexities, which beset an unoccupied and sensitive mind. “You should live,” Martha would often say, “as I do, in the midst of a family of ten children, to know what trouble is.” And perhaps it was from this circumstance that Martha derived much of the tumultuous elements of which her character was composed; on the one hand, easily excited to affectionate warmth; and on the other, as easily excited to a kind of warmth which affection had need be strong indeed to endure. With all

her faults, however, she was not ungenerous ; though in strict justice it must at the same time be confessed, that, with all her virtues, she failed to make the course of daily life either peaceful or smooth.

That discord should sometimes prevail in her father's family, was not altogether the fault of Martha, whose efforts were perpetually exerted on behalf of order and quiet, somewhat upon the same principle which actuates a number of persons to cry "hush" with such vehemence, that silence might seem to be the last thing they were desiring to produce. Thus, when one of Martha's younger brothers exclaimed, how much he wished she would get married and go away, in order that they might quarrel peaceably, with no one to hinder them, he gave unconsciously a pretty fair idea of the quaint state of things beneath his father's roof.

Yet with all this tendency of habit and character, Martha was still true to her friend, the gentle and pensive Mary ; while the clergyman's daughter in her turn loved the society of her childhood's playmate, because it brought with it a sort of relief from the monotony of her own thoughts, and supplied the vivacity which she so much needed ; for, say what poets and sentimentalists may, of the luxury of ruminating alone, of wandering in churchyards, and meditating under the shadow of ancient trees, that loneliness is not the worse for being occasionally broken in upon by a cheerful companion ; those wanderings, from being shared by a lively friend ; or the meditations of a moonlight evening, for being followed by the wholesome recreation of an evening fireside chat, on subjects not exactly admissible within the pale of sentiment.

"Ah, Mary," said Martha to her friend one day, as they rambled through the fields together, "if I could be soft and gentle like you, I suppose I should please everybody, and offend none. Well, it is never too late to improve. But, after all, this great spirit of mine is often very useful to me."

"And a little troublesome, too, I dare say," said Mary.

"Troublesome!" exclaimed Martha, and her pretty face in the same instant assumed that look of flashing indignation, which, however becoming it might be to the beauty, was by no means a favourable omen in the woman—"Troublesome," she repeated, in the same impatient tone, "what can you mean? I think if others troubled me no more than I trouble them, my life would be very different from what it is."

"I do not mean that your fine spirit troubles others, Martha," said Mary, very quietly, "but yourself."

"How so?" asked her friend.

"By making it very difficult for you to submit, when circumstances require that you should."

"I don't know but you are right there," said Martha; "yet, for all that, I maintain that a good spirit is a great help, particularly in a situation like mine. How, for instance, would it be possible for me to manage all my brothers and sisters, to say nothing of the servants, and the housekeeping, and sometimes my father too, if I had not a great spirit?"

"But what will you do with this wonderful spirit," asked Mary, "if ever you are married?"

"That day will never come," replied Martha. "I have had enough, and a little too much, of the wear and tear of a household and a family already. And as to loving

any man well enough to marry him, I don't believe I could. It is for you to make that experiment, Mary, and when you have moped away a year or so with that pale scholar of yours, I will come and see how it answers, for I am sure you will want somebody to amuse and cheer you, by that time."

It was now Mary's turn to betray, though by a very different expression of countenance, a slight touch of that indignation which her friend had been so quick to exhibit; but though the colour of her cheek was heightened, she did not condescend to reply by any allusion to the subject nearest her heart. Indeed, it was on this subject, and this alone, that Mary could never converse freely with her friend; for Martha persisted in maintaining a war, at least of words, against all love affairs, whether connected with herself or others, and particularly in cases where love alone was made the basis of a permanent connexion.

"If," she would often say, "I should ever have the good fortune to win the heart of a rich old gentleman, living in a grand mansion, where I should have nothing to do but to order one servant to do this, and another to do that, while I sat in my easy chair, or rode out on my white palfrey, taking my ease and my pleasure when I liked—why then, Mary, I don't say but what I might change my mind, and take pity on the good old gentleman, who would no doubt reward me by being pleased with everything I did."

"And suppose," said Mary, "you could find a young one disposed to be equally pleased?"

"Youth is fickle," replied Martha. "I will never trust it."

"But love, if worthy of the name, is true."

“Ah, there you are again,” exclaimed Martha; “perpetually in the sentimentals, where I cannot follow you. I hear a great deal of talk about this wonderful thing you call love, and marriages are made every day professedly on this foundation; but visit those happy couples a few years after they have retired with their smiles and their blushes from the altar, where they were the envy of all the youths and maidens in the parish: try them then by the puzzling question why they were married, and they will be too much ashamed of their own inconsistency to mention such a thing as love. No, Mary, this ignis fatuus of yours shall never be the means of leading me astray. When I marry, it shall be for wealth, and ease, and quiet; and when I invite you to see me, I will point to my well-covered table, and handsome furniture, and comfortable couches, and ask you to be my judge, whether I have been disappointed.”

“But if you should happen to fall in love, Martha?”

“I may happen many accidents, but not that,” replied the unyielding girl.

As Martha uttered these words, the rapid trampling of a horse's hoofs was heard along the lane into which the two friends were about to enter, by a stile which crossed the footpath through the fields. They paused, however, to let the animal pass by, for the furious pace at which it hurried on alarmed them both; but still more alarming to Mary, was the frightful shriek of her companion, when, as the animal without a rider flew past them, Martha exclaimed—“It is Fleetwood's horse!” and at the same time springing over the stile, hurried down the lane in the direction from whence the horse had come.

All this was a perfect mystery to Mary. She knew

who Fleetwood was—a gay young gentleman in the neighbourhood, more distinguished as a boon companion, and a lover of field-sports, than as a man of talent or of influence. That he, in some careless moment, should have lost the command of his steed, she could also well understand; but what connexion either horse or rider should have with Martha, to excite such violent emotion on her part, remained to be a matter of such incalculable wonder, as for some time to fix her as if rooted to the spot. At last, however, recollecting that whatever the cause might be, under which her friend had acted so extraordinary a part, it was her duty to endeavour to see the end of this strange scene, she walked along the lane, looking this way, and that, and expecting every moment to see Martha laughing by her side, after having played her one of those girlish tricks, to which she was by no means unaccustomed.

No symptoms of her friend's returning footsteps, however, appeared, and Mary walked leisurely on, until startled by an object which she discovered to be Martha's bonnet lying in the middle of the road, and at the same time looking onward, she beheld in the distance a group of figures, some standing, and others stooping, by the side of the road. Amongst them she could distinctly see a female figure; and while the others, who all appeared to be workmen, were sent off in different directions, she could see, as she approached, that the same female remained as if bending over something, which lay like the form of a man extended on the ground.

So intent was the female, who was no other than Martha herself, upon the almost lifeless form before her, that she perceived not the approach of her friend; but with flushed cheeks, and dishevelled hair, still stooping

low, as if to catch the faintest sign of life, she bathed the pale temples and blue lips of him who evidently knew not to whose hands he was indebted for this kindness.

“Martha! Martha!” exclaimed Mary, “what are you doing?” and she too bent down to discover who it was, upon whom her friend was bestowing so much care.

“There!” shrieked Martha, as a slight but unnatural movement passed across his countenance, “did you not see that? Oh, Mary—dear Mary, he is—he must be dying.”

The look, and the voice of perfect agony with which the unguarded girl said these words, revealed her secret at once, and Mary was not slow to understand it; while, so far from reproaching her friend in that trying moment, for the rashness and imprudence of her conduct, she felt that a mine of hidden feeling in the bosom of that friend, had now been suddenly revealed, and kneeling down beside her on the grass, she too applied her gentle hands to administer, if it were possible, though but a trifling relief.

Nor was it long before more able and efficient help arrived. The men who had been sent off in different directions returned, and one of them was shortly followed by the doctor, who had happily been met upon the road. It seemed as if the mention of the young man’s name had been enough to guide the judgment of this sage personage, for no sooner had one of the company spoken of “Squire Fleetwood’s son,” than the doctor nodded, and even smiled, as if he perfectly understood the case; and at the same time turning to the ladies, said,—“This is no place or scene for you, my dear young people.”

“Why not?” asked Martha, rather sharply. “We may at least see that he is placed under proper care in the nearest cottage.”

"I tell you again," replied the doctor, "that this is not a lady's case;" and he spoke this time in so imperative and reproving a tone, that Mary immediately started up, and would willingly have drawn her friend away from the spot.

"I will stay at least," said Martha, "until these men have carried him away. He may die in the moving, and I am sure it is always women who manage these things best."

"My dear young friend," said the doctor, stooping down, and speaking in a loud whisper; "the young man was intoxicated. I saw him myself not half an hour ago. He was then reeling in his saddle; and now, whether he live or die, let me tell you, young Fleetwood is not a character fit to be watched and waited upon by respectable ladies."

It was as if every drop of maiden shame which Martha had ever known was burning in her face, and every spark of indignation she had ever experienced flashing in her eyes, as she rose from her humble attitude; while, standing erect beyond her usual height, she said—"Whatever the young man may be, his father is my father's friend, and I, as having known him since childhood, am bound to see that he is cared for in this, perhaps his last, extremity. But as you seem to think I had better leave him to his fate, perhaps you will be kind enough to tell me what is your opinion of the nature of the injury he has sustained, in order that I may inform his friends of his real state, and not alarm them unnecessarily?"

This, in the opinion of the doctor, was speaking like a reasonable woman, and as the information required was quite in his line to give, he entered into a very minute description of the situation of his patient, from which,

unintelligible as it was in other respects, the two friends contrived to gather an assurance that no serious injury had been done, and that no danger was therefore to be apprehended.

With this comforting assurance, the two ladies turned away, to retrace their steps to the village. For a long time they walked in perfect silence, for Mary was too delicate in her own feelings to take advantage of the distressing situation of her friend; and justly regarding all confidence as worthless and unavailing except where it is willingly offered, she determined that unless her friend should herself allude to the scene which had just transpired, she would never mention it again. She was therefore under the necessity of remaining silent, although that very silence was irksome, for it could have been little less than an insult to the feelings of her friend, had she attempted at such a time to converse on common or indifferent subjects.

No sooner, however, had the two friends reached the stile by which they were to enter again upon the foot-path through the fields, than Martha stopped suddenly, and with a forced smile, which ill accorded with the tears that stood in her bright eyes, she said, "I am afraid I have made a great simpleton of myself to-day, Mary; but you must not speak of this, as you love me, and value my peace of mind."

"You may trust me, dear Martha," said Mary, in the kindest manner, "Indeed, I needed no such caution. I should never have mentioned the subject again, either to you or to any one else."

"That is very good of you, Mary. It is more than I deserve; for not having made you more entirely my friend, and for all the stories I told you not an hour ago. But

indeed, Mary, I did not know they were such. I assure you I did not know my own heart until this frightful scene revealed it to me in all its folly."

"And you feel now that you could love Robert Fleetwood?"

"I feel that I not only could, but do love him; though never until this moment has such a confession passed my lips."

"You are surely not ignorant of his character?"

"I am not ignorant that a great deal is said against him, and that much of what is said, is but too well deserved; but his faults are such as belong to youth, and such as I doubt not a good wife would correct."

"And your father?"

"My father of course knows nothing of the nature of our intimacy. You know Fleetwood has always been accustomed to come to our house as a sort of second home. We have in a manner grown up together; and whatever his faults may be in other respects, I believe he has been true and faithful to me."

"But it must be a long time yet, before he can be in a situation to marry."

"Yes, a long time, and for that reason I don't wish my father to be troubled with suspicions about us; for that reason I have never until this hour given him cause, either by word or deed, to think that I loved him, in any other way than as a friend, or a brother."

Although Martha was not a person to fancy herself into an attachment where it did not exist, nor to make a parade of her feelings where it did; and although her simplicity and straightforwardness, when she chose to be serious, were such as to inspire the greatest confidence in her sincerity and truth, her friend, whose interest had been

excited in favour of a lover whose character differed entirely from that of Robert Fleetwood, could scarcely believe it possible for Martha to be in earnest in what she said ; and but for the recollection of her look and manner, as she stooped beside that apparently lifeless form, the whole might have been regarded as the mere excitement of a vivid fancy, wrought upon by the extraordinary nature of the occasion.

Love with Mary was a totally different thing from what it was with her friend ; but it did not follow that with Martha it was less real, or less intense. With Mary it was a sentimental partiality, elevated in its object, and refined in its exercise. It was approved too in her case by her parents, and by the circle of society in which she moved ; while the highly gifted and erudite young scholar who visited at the parsonage, was thought to have made an excellent and worthy choice in, selecting as the companion of his future life the clergyman's only child.

To this connection there was, however, one serious obstacle, the want of ample means ; but Mary thought that with a little money, and a great deal of love, it would be possible to be very happy. Her parents too, knowing that in case of their death she would be left sufficiently provided for, were the less anxious for the present ; besides which, Mr. Churchill was well acquainted with the capabilities of the young man to whom he was about to commit the future happiness of his child ; and although his talents and acquirements were certainly not of the most popular description, he had prospects of future distinction, and ultimate success, of no ordinary nature, depending chiefly upon the prosecution of a great work he had in hand—a work for which he was peculiarly qualified, and

which had already brought him either into contact or correspondence with many of the most learned and scientific men of the day. It is true this work was one requiring the most extensive research, accompanied with patience and industry, both which he possessed in a degree beyond most persons of his age. Indeed the perfect and unvarying devotedness with which the student pursued this the great object of his life, was such as to leave him little time, and less interest, to bestow upon any other; and the wonder to many common-minded persons was, how he had ever allowed his attention to be attracted by the fair face of woman, or in fact had conceived an idea that his happiness could be enhanced by the pleasures of female companionship.

It is not for us to attempt to solve this mystery. It might be that his household had fallen into disorder, and that female aid was required to restore it to a proper state; or it might be, and most probably it was, that there were weaker and warmer spots in the young man's heart, than the generality of observers were aware of. Suffice it, that Mary herself was satisfied, and that she was so with but little attention and little homage, is not unlikely, from the fact of her never having had a lover before, and therefore never having known the extent of extravagance to which the love of man can sometimes carry its lordly professor. Thus a little kindness, a little flattery from one so highly gifted, told powerfully upon the heart of the solitary maiden, who sometimes for hours together would muse in the churchyard, or along the quiet fields, upon some faint expression of regard which, by a woman more practised in the usages of society, would have been unheeded and unfelt.

On the other hand, however, there was considerable

evidence of a consolatory nature, that the young man was in reality more under the influence of the tender passion than his customary behaviour would have led any one to suppose ; for on one occasion he was known to have proceeded nearly half the way from the parsonage to the town without his hat ; and on another he forgot himself so far as to address to the lady of his choice a letter which ought to have reached a learned professor in one of the Universities, and at the same time to favour the professor with an epistle addressed to his beloved Mary.

It must be confessed that such circumstances as these, when told again, and made the subject of familiar raillery, did sometimes cost poor Mary a blush of shame, not altogether unaccompanied with humiliation : but from her childhood she had been accustomed to reverence above all other attainments that of learning ; and while she looked upon the society of a man of talent as essential to a state of refined and intellectual happiness, she naturally thought, that, as the wife of an author, she must necessarily hold an envied and exalted place amongst women. These secret consolations then supported her through many an hour of trial, nor was there ever absent from the catalogue of merits which it was the work of her fancy to hang about her lover, that one transcendent excellence in the estimation of a romantic girl—a gentlemanly appearance and address.

In this her stronghold of satisfaction, how proud, how exulting was the heart of Mary, when she contrasted her choice of a companion with that of her friend, for if there was anything which Mary hated upon earth, it was vulgarity. Thus the pale countenance, thin features, high forehead, and light figure of Henry Melville were often triumphantly contrasted with the appearance of young

Fleetwood, who, while his countenance possessed almost every requisite for manly beauty, it must be confessed, had a little deviated from the exact line of intellectual refinement. Yet to say that Fleetwood was vulgar, would not have done him justice, because he was entirely without pretension. Simple-hearted, straightforward, and manly, he was occasionally boisterous, and often blunt; but a readier hand to defend the unprotected, or a warmer heart to glow with genuine feeling, was not to be found. "The more was the pity," Martha used to say, "that his childhood had been so shamefully neglected, and that he had grown up such a self-willed and hot-headed creature, that there was no such thing as living with him in comfort, or in peace."

And all these things Martha used to say of him of her own accord; but if any one else presumed to say the same, if they did but venture to join in her remarks, she would instantly turn upon them, if not with a direct contradiction, yet with such palliations and excuses for the young man's faults, that the partiality which Martha had succeeded in concealing from her unsuspecting friend, was generally known and understood amongst the circle of society in which she moved.

It is possible that the perceptions of Mary had been particularly obtuse on this point, from the extreme contempt she had been in the habit of entertaining for young men of Robert Fleetwood's character. Pensive, delicate, and sentimental in the turn of her own mind, she was at once shocked and disgusted with his hearty laugh, and the general freedom and ease of his manner. Even the keen sportsman's appetite with which he ate his dinner, was an offence to her; his shooting-dress, perhaps not unjustly, an abomination; but above all, his familiar con-

versation about dogs and horses, made her wish, from the bottom of her heart, that he had fixed his eagle-eyes, in their bewitching glance of admiration, upon some peasant's daughter, rather than upon her luckless friend.

And a hard and trying thing it is to friendship, when people will choose in this way ; when they will persist in uniting themselves with those who would have been the very last we should have chosen for them. It is, in fact, the most direct and positive violence done to our feelings, without leaving us the satisfaction of having something to complain of. It is like marrying the person one's self, for, bear with him we must, and speak out respecting him we must not. There is nothing for it but submission, for this stranger—this worse than stranger—this repulsive being from whom we could have fled as from an enemy, must now be admitted to our confidence, must hear our early history, and read our letters, and be let into our most secret and private thoughts. The garden of early flowers, in which we revelled with the beloved companion of our childhood, by his rude feet must now be trampled down ; for to talk of his appreciating its sweets, would be a mockery of words. The veil of mystery which hung around our friendship, screening it as by a charmed curtain from the vulgar world, this curtain must now be torn aside ; for is he not the husband, and the master, and has he not the unquestionable right, according to his good pleasure, to look in ? What wonder that so little female friendship should survive this test !

CHAP. V.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

IN glancing over the revolving seasons of two short years, we find that an important change has been made in the situation of the two friends. Martha might seem almost to have attained the summit of her girlish wish, for she is seated in a chair which looks as if it might be easy, beside the blazing fire, in an old and spacious hall, while the rightful owner, and now, in consequence of his father's sudden death, the sole proprietor of that old mansion, with all its surrounding woods, and fields—not the old doating man of wealth whom Martha had always professed it was her wish to captivate, but the handsome happy-looking young squire, is lounging on a couch beside her; his eager dogs, with asking eyes directed alternately to his face, and then to that of the fair lady, as if they wondered how it was that one so lovely and so young could forbid them to share, as they had often done, their master's bed, and board.

"Come up, Dido," said Flectwood at last, in answer to a piteous whine; and immediately not one dog only, but two large pointers, and a greyhound, were trampling on the couch, and adjusting themselves, as well as they could agree to do, so that all might sleep in that place of privileged repose.

“Now, Fleetwood,” said Martha, starting up, “I tell you again, that shall not be. Here have I been toiling for the last week like any slave, and trying to make all things clean and comfortable, and your dogs, it seems, are to enjoy the fruit of my labours.”

“My poor old Fly,” said Fleetwood, extending his hand for the greyhound to lick, “you have not been getting married, have you? that you must submit to woman’s rule?”

“Married, or not married,” said Martha with a smart slap of her pretty hand upon more than one of the dogs, “I will not submit to you.”

“Oh, dear!” exclaimed Fleetwood, rising from the couch, “I see there is no more peace in this house, either for man or beast.”

Whether the master said this in jest or earnest, was not very clear from the tone of his voice; but certainly the expression of his face was anything but one of pleasure, as he walked straight to the window, and after looking out for a few seconds, turned quickly round, and, whistling up his dogs, walked briskly out with a business-like air, as if he had suddenly recollected something that ought to be attended to.

The habitation to which Mary had been translated, by the same important step which her friend had taken, though situated at the distance of only one mile, and at the outskirts of her native town, was of a widely different character from Martha’s home. At first, when Mary had gone with her mother to inspect this house, it had appeared roomy and comfortable; so much so, that bright visions were indulged, of sofas here, and tables there, and chiffoneers, and ottomans, and all the other customary accompaniments of a lady’s boudoir; but no

sooner did the happy pair arrive from their short wedding-tour, and that important business, the arrangement of the books begin, than it became evident to all the parties concerned, that either a larger house must be taken, or many of the most ornamental pieces of furniture turned out. Nor was this all, Mary had had her drawing-room fitted up under the inspection of her mother, whose ideas of respectability depended much upon the figure a person, or a room is able to make, before what is generally called company. Two small apartments on the first story had therefore been thrown into one, a bow-window built out, and everything which female ingenuity could devise effected, to ensure the desirable result of having an elegant drawing-room in which her daughter might receive her guests. What then could equal the astonishment, both of the mother and the bride, to find that the scholar actually chuckled with delight, as he gazed around, and declared it his intention to appropriate this room to his books?

It was by no means the least prominent trait in the character of Henry Melville, that he was a man not to be reasoned with, at least by a woman; concluding, as his father before him had done, and as many sons and fathers probably will do to the end of time, that in all disputed points between the two sexes, the weaker party must necessarily be wrong; and in this belief he had from infancy been confirmed, on the ground that to men, as the repositories of wisdom and of learning, must of course belong, not only the power of judging, but the still more important right to decide. Besides which, he was so ignorant of common things, as to be inaccessible to argument on that side of the question; and thus, without the least idea that he could be inflicting upon others any



The Girl discovered

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trial of their patience or forbearance, he was perpetually saying and doing what would have ruffled the temper of the meekest woman upon earth.

As an instance of this, when his wife applied to him one day to know in what room he thought it possible for her to entertain her friends, he coolly replied, In the room she usually occupied, of course. Now this room being one of the two lower ones, not opening into each other, and less than the half of his study, by the whole width of a passage, it was not only extremely dull, but extremely small; and Mary therefore remonstrated, saying, the thing was impossible.

"Then I think you had better not have friends, my dear," was the unconcerned reply. "I do not think friends are of much use, and they occupy a great deal of time."

"Time!" exclaimed Mary. "It is the very thing I have too much of. I must have friends, if it be only to help me to get rid of it."

"Indeed!" said Melville, as little moved as before. "I am glad you find yourself so much at liberty, for we can now begin that course of study together, which I have sometimes heard you regret having neglected while under your father's care."

"Study!" exclaimed the bride, with a look of rueful apprehension.

"Yes," replied the husband, "I think you have made some progress in Latin. Let me see, I have an Ovid somewhere. I should like to hear you scan."

"Oh, don't fetch it now," cried Mary, as her husband hastened upstairs. "I am just going out to walk. I have promised my mother I would meet her at the upholsterer's." And Mary's shawl and bonnet were put on, and

the door of the house closed after her, in a shorter space of time than she had ever taken to make her exit for a promenade before.

"What shall I do, mother," said the disconsolate wife, and her grievances began to be recited, while her tears simultaneously fell, as she and her mother leaned against the counter of the shop, where they had met to purchase certain articles, which without friends, and without company, or more properly without an opportunity of exhibiting them, would be useless in the extreme.

"What shall I do?" said the wife again in her most piteous tone. "He is married to his books, and I am nothing."

"It was just the same with your father when I first married," said the mother, with a look of great encouragement.

"And how did you manage?" asked Mary eagerly.

"Why, I sometimes cried, and sometimes scolded," replied the woman of experience. "I let him have no rest. And he soon found out, that if he valued peace—in short, that if he would have any time to devote to the study of his favourite books, he must let me have my own way in the things I had set my heart upon; or, in other words, in the things that were only reasonable for a woman in my situation to expect."

"And so you got on from less to more?"

"Yes, I worked on; for I was always at it, night and day. Before breakfast in the morning I began, and when he was tired in the evening, I never let him sleep until he had promised me the thing I wanted."

"And he loved you through all this?" asked Mary.

"Oh, yes!" replied the mother. "Men are bound to love their wives."

Mary looked as if she did not quite see into the connexion between the conclusion, and the previously stated facts ; but she went home, nevertheless, instructed, if not edified, and supported for the present by a feeble resolution, that, so far as she was able, she would carry out her mother's plan.

In her own character, however, Mary was as little calculated as any woman could be to act a part, which, notwithstanding its offensive nature, had but too often been found to answer the chief end of a mean and selfish spirit. Naturally tender and susceptible in her feelings, Mary had become habitually indolent, and irresolute, owing to the ill-judged indulgence of a foolish and wrong-minded mother. Like her other parent, she was a lover of peace ; and had she been married to a man of common understanding in matters appertaining to female comfort, would have made one of those unobjectionable wives, with which the generality of men contrive to get on as well as with better.

For a few weeks, however, Mary tried the experiment, as far as she was able, to carry out her mother's plan ; but her deliberate conviction at the end of this time was, that it would not do.

"Why not?" inquired the mother.

"Because," said Mary, "it is painful and disagreeable to me, and has no sort of effect upon my husband."

"How so?" inquired the mother again. "I am afraid you only half do the thing. You are possibly too well—too cheerful."

"Cheerful!" exclaimed Mary. "I have almost forgotten that I ever smiled in my whole life. Cheerful, indeed!" and a tear stole down her cheek, in silent witness of the truth of what she said

"Ah! that is how you ought to look," said the mother, catching a fresh ray of hope from this omen. "Few men can resist actual tears."

"But Melville never sees them," said Mary, "though I am sure I have shed an ocean since I married."

"Perhaps you eat your dinner comfortably?" inquired the mother.

"Why, yes," replied Mary, "it is almost the only comfort I have left."

"There you are wrong, child," observed the mother again. A man never pities the woman who can eat. You should live without food—absolutely starve in his presence."

"I tried the experiment once," said Mary, with great simplicity. "I sent away every morsel to which he helped me untouched."

"And what was the result?"

"That he ate his dinner that day as comfortably as usual; and so far from noticing what I had done, observed, as he finished, that he thought *our* appetites were pretty good."

"Indeed!" said the mother, very seriously, and looking as if she now began to suspect, for the first time, that her daughter's might be a peculiar case. "Then Melville is not kind-hearted and affectionate, as your poor father was when we first married?"

"Oh, yes," said Mary; "he has no thought of being otherwise than kind; but, as I said before, he is married to his books."

And so it was. And consequently in supposing she was to be to the heart and feelings of Henry Melville all that a wife should be, poor Mary had made almost as great a mistake, as if, at the time of her marriage, he had

been affianced to another, more lovely and beloved than herself. It is true she was all he wished her to be in her domestic sphere—the piece of fire-side furniture, without which his home was incomplete—the medium of authority between himself and those beneath him, without which the order of his house could not have been maintained. But, alas ! beyond this, he had had his calculations of far wider range ; and docile and teachable as Mary seemed to be, and brought up too under the instruction of a learned father, he had been as he thought but reasonable, in supposing that she would be a willing instrument in his hands, in forwarding the great work which occupied unquestionably the first place in his heart. What then was his astonishment, to find that Mary would not—could not learn ; that she even seemed to loathe the task ; and that, so far from assisting him in the great object of his life, she had the folly, nay, the presumption, for he could not think it less, to throw hinderances in his way, and actually to set in competition with the importance of his pursuits, her own little matters relating to bodily and personal enjoyment.

It was astonishing how rapidly the star of Mary's ascendant went down, as her husband became gradually acquainted with such humiliating facts as these ; and the more so, that in their previous acquaintance his expectations of her usefulness had been kept alive by her professed love of study, and her apparent admiration of learned men, and learned books. Alas ! how reckless of consequences is poor woman, with her first lover by her side ; and how weak that softest part of her nature which leads her not only to say, but to think, for the time being, that she admires and loves whatever is most admirable and lovely to him ! How often, from the betrayal of this

weakness, arising simply out of those strong sympathies which are her natural gift, is she afterwards accused of insincerity, and of having played a part to gain a selfish end.

In Mary's case, as well as that of hundreds similarly circumstanced, she had with perfect truth lamented over her deficiencies; and more especially when listening to the conversation of her father and her lover, had wished she was herself more fitted to be the companion of learned men. But after marriage—after attaining that grand eminence from which women look down upon the world, and plume themselves upon being mistress of their own houses—to begin then to learn, and to begin, as she necessarily must, with the very alphabet of knowledge, was a thing as much beyond her calculations, as to begin again to walk in leading-strings, and to be treated in all respects as if she were an idiot, or a child.

No; meek as Mary was, and fond of peace, and passive as she had hitherto shown herself in all the important affairs of life, even she had a spirit that would not stoop to this; and moreover—and here perhaps the great secret lay concealed—she was habitually too indolent to engage in any occupation requiring application, more especially in one so little calculated to bring an immediate reward in the enjoyment it would procure.

It is an obvious fact, arising out of a law of our nature, that where the feelings are sensitive, and the mental faculties inert, whether this disproportion in sensation and action arises out of natural constitution, or, as is more likely, out of ill-conducted education, there is always in persons thus afflicted—for we can call it nothing less—a tendency to seek excitement wherever it can be found; in short, to feed upon it, and to derive from it a sort of borrowed strength and animation, which so affects their

nervous system, that, for the time it lasts, they believe this strength and animation to be in reality a part of themselves. Such individuals are generally dependent for this supply upon society, public amusements, and novel reading; and happy, thrice happy, is it for them, if they do not learn to be dependent also upon another kind of stimulus, which though too often regarded as less hurtful than some of these, is far more difficult to check in its influence upon our bodily and mental frame.

But to return to the listless disappointed wife whose situation we have attempted to describe. Afflictions she had none, of a nature to be complained of to any but a mother; but who shall paint the leaden dulness of her home?—the cold and joyless atmosphere in which she lived—the absolute nothingness of her existence, except so far as a sort of restless aching consciousness was left—a pining of the heart not so much for attainment of that which might be, as for escape from that which was. And then the sameness of each day—the very seasons seemed to bring no change. Green spring, and yellow autumn; summer with its golden sun, and winter with its hoary frost, were all alike to her. Without occupation, because she had neither necessity nor motive for exertion; without hope, because she had nothing in particular to wish; without religious consolation, because she had never been taught really to regard it as the one thing needful; what wonder that a being thus constituted, and fixed down as it were for life in the midst of circumstances such as these, should become a prey to morbid feelings of almost every description, and, in order to allay the misery arising out of the almost intolerable burden of such feelings, should have recourse to any means which might occur of producing, by temporary excitement, some transient relief.

Novel-reading became very naturally Mary's first resource ; but as she did little else, the volumes passed through her hands so rapidly, that, fertile and productive as the circulating library was in the adjacent town, the regular supply became inadequate to her demand ; and there were times, too, when the expected volume failed to come, and then the blank of her existence must necessarily be filled up in some other way.

It had never occurred to Mary before her marriage, to derive the slightest gratification from stimulating cordials, taken in the usual way, and under the usual plea of strengthening the body, and invigorating the mind ; but no sooner was she mistress of her own means, than she felt that these cordials awakened as it were a new and different sense, so that not only was the keenness taken off from her perceptions of what was painful and humiliating, but a vigour, a life, and an energy imparted, to enjoy with double zest the little that remained to her of meagre satisfaction. Under the influence of this excitement, her very novels became more enchanting, or at least she read them with an eye less critical and exact. Her husband, too, and his dry books, she could look upon without repulsion, and even sometimes felt inclined to join him in his study, in order to try the experiment of beguiling him into a little cheerful chat on common and familiar themes. To all idea of being in her turn drawn in to join him in his pursuits, and to aid him in his labours, she was however as much opposed as ever ; but then she could speak kindly, and even playfully, on this most painful subject ; and altogether the complexion of her life seemed changed, at least during the continuance of the excitement which she was daily and hourly learning more and more to love.

And now arose an endless train of bodily disorders,

and nervous ailments, which had never occupied her thoughts, or awakened her fears, before—a sense of depression at times as if her constitution had received some serious shock ; and then a physician was consulted, who recommended the most wholesome and nourishing wines, with a little—a very little, brandy-and-water taken with her meals. Her digestive organs, he told her, were deranged, and that nothing was so likely as gentle stimulants to enable them to perform their necessary office, in supporting the animal, and indeed the mental, frame ; for all the strange feelings of which she complained,—the sinking, the faintness, the frightful dreams, the headaches, the flushings, the cold feet, occasional shiverings, and palpitations of the heart, but above all, the nervous apprehension of some great calamity always impending,—were attributed, and perhaps not unjustly, by the physician, to this cause. His only mistake was, in the means he prescribed for removing it.

“I am sorry you have been so ill,” said Martha to her friend one day, when she had walked over to Fleetwood, for this was the name of the old family mansion in which Martha lived. “I heard Dr. B— had been called in, and I have been quite alarmed about you.”

“I was, indeed,” said Mary, “and am still very seriously indisposed.”

“I cannot say you look ill,” observed her friend.

“No, that is the worst feature in my malady,” replied Mary, “because, let me suffer as I may, I get no pity. But, Martha dear, I am dreadfully fatigued ; I thought I never should have climbed the hill. It is rather early in the day, yet I really should thank you for a glass of wine.”

With the promptness which characterized all her

actions, Martha soon unlocked her store, and having placed the necessary refreshment on the table, sat down again, and inquired, with all the interest of real kindness, into the nature of her friend's complaints.

Well was it for her, that this kindness knew no narrow bounds ; for the subject once fairly opened, Mary became eloquent beyond her usual powers, and, what with the detail of mental and bodily sufferings, Martha might have been fixed down in her chair for a longer time than it was usually occupied, had not a tiny voice from a pretty cradle which swung by the parlour fire, reminded her that there were claims of paramount importance to those of an invalid friend ; while, with a sort of playful reproach, she accused her friend of never before having made an effort to come and welcome the little stranger, whom she now exhibited with all the pride and fondness of a mother. "I have really been too ill," said Mary, but at the same time extending her arms, she received the precious burden, and bent over it for a moment with a look more sad than pleased.

"You are a happy woman, Martha," said she, at last, returning the charge.

"Why so?" asked Martha.

Mary shook her head, and her lips trembled as the burning tears stole down her cheeks.

"My dear creature," said Martha, really commiserating her distress, "if you knew half the trouble this little helpless thing has brought, you would not envy me."

"It is not for that exactly," said Mary, "but"—and covering her face with her hands, she burst into a violent fit of weeping.

In an instant the arm of Martha was around her neck, the rosy cheek of the mother was pressed to the pale fore-

head of her friend, while she implored her, in the simple unsophisticated language of their early love, to tell her what was the cause of her grief, and if there was anything in which she could assist to restore her peace of mind.

"No, there is nothing," said Mary, in the tone of helpless and hopeless despair, "and nobody can help me in the slightest degree. I must bear my own burden, and I ought not to speak of it even to you."

By degrees, however, she did speak of it, going on from one thing to another, while Martha, who, from so serious a beginning, had anticipated something dreadful in the extreme, and who had no tendency to sympathize with any fancied evil, listened with earnest expectation for the development of some dire conclusion, to which she doubted not but all Mary's catalogue of daily trials would tend.

"And is that all?" exclaimed Martha, at last, when she had listened for a long time, and nothing more important came.

"All!" exclaimed Mary. "What would you have?"

"Why, not an author for my husband, certainly," replied Martha, with a smile, "but as for the rest, admiring talent as you do, I don't see what there is so much to be complained of, and, after all, it is nothing but what I should have expected."

"Is it nothing, then," said Mary, "to be forgotten—overlooked—despised?"

"There is no absolute necessity," replied Martha, "for any one of these consequences to follow even such a choice as you have made."

"But what can I do?" asked Mary.

"Why, I will tell you what I would do," replied her friend, in a prompt and business-like manner, as if she

saw the subject very clearly. "Seeing you have so much time upon your hands, and always were so fond of books, and cleverness, and that sort of thing, I would set about in good earnest, and study as your husband wishes, and then you might be able to assist him in the end. You say he is not intentionally unkind, and what should hinder him from becoming all you wished, if you would but do something towards meeting his wishes in your turn. It is astonishing the power a wife may gain over a husband, by conforming to his tastes, even in things of no importance; what then would be the measure of your influence, if, in that which Melville regards as most important, you were to show this wise and prudent consideration, which after all is no more than the duty of a wife."

"I did not come here to be lectured on my duties," thought Mary to herself; but she was silent, and her friend went on in the same improving strain, until called away by some domestic avocations. And now the dinner-hour arrived, and choice viands were dished up, and all things were in preparation, and the master did not come; and then loud voices began to be heard, and hurrying feet went to and fro, and little boys were sent out into the fields to look, and workmen were inquired of, and still no master came. And all this while was Martha seated in her easy chair! Alas! that chair had little ease for her; for now, with heightened bloom, and angry brow, she went from place to place, with manner as perturbed, as if the moving of the earth upon its axis depended on her husband's prompt and punctual return.

At last he came, and woe betide the luckless wight who enters from the fields at such a time—who enters, as Fleetwood often did, with ploughman's boots, and shoot-coat, and hair dishevelled by the winds, a full hour

beyond the time, at which his wife had made him promise to return.

Fleetwood, however, was a man apparently unmoved by the sight of the cold dishes standing round the kitchen-fire, and even by the unemployed domestics who stood here and there in waiting and impatient attitudes, occasionally venturing to look askance at him, upon whose unlucky head the tempest of indignation was about to fall. Unmoved by all this, there was, if the whole truth could have been known, a spectacle which even he, the master of that stationary scene, was scarcely able to brook without a sort of inward quaking of the heart, which yet he strove to hide, by sometimes speaking playfully aside to his dogs, or his domestics, though often with a bitterness in his jests, which too well betrayed the real state of his mind.

It was such a pity, he often thought, that Martha should spoil her pretty face by angry looks—that she could not let him rest in his own home—in short, that she would not let that home be happy, when they had everything to make them so. Besides which, was he not the master there? Yes, and he would be master too. He would be just as late for dinner as he liked, and she might make the best of it she could.

With these noble and manly resolutions the master of Fleetwood met his wife, or rather she met him, for no sooner was the sound of his step distinguishable in the hall, than Martha flounced out of the room, and a scene of altercation and recrimination took place, in which Mary congratulated herself that she had no part to take. Such was her conviction, however, that her friend was in the wrong, that no sooner had Martha returned, than she rose from her seat, and, laying her hand impressively upon

her arm, "Martha," said she, "I am afraid I shall have to repeat to you your own advice. Remember, how easily men are influenced by meeting them half way."

"Yes," exclaimed Martha, not in the slightest degree subdued, "and I would have met him had he returned at the expiration of the half hour. I appeal to you, whether I was not patient until then. But one hour—there is no bearing it—none. And the worst is, it is always so."

"Then I should have thought you might have learned to bear it by this time," observed Mary.

"No, I will never learn—I will never bear it," said Martha; and as Fleetwood at that moment entered the room, her friend deemed it most wise to be silent.

The dinner was an uncomfortable meal, as such dinners always are; quite sufficiently spoiled to confirm all which the lady of the house had said about it, yet not so bad as to afford any pleasant-tempered woman sufficient ground for complaint. By the time the cloth had been removed, however, both the master and the guest had begun to be more cheerful; and Martha too, being occupied with her baby, a more agreeable tone of feeling seemed to pervade the party. The days were then short, and Mary had intended walking home to tea, but Fleetwood insisting upon being the companion of her walk, if she would but stay a few hours longer, and return by the light of a full moon, Mary, to whom her silent home had few attractions, was without much difficulty prevailed upon to consent.

Robert Fleetwood, like many men of his class, was not addicted to after-dinner intelligence. Accustomed to exercise in the fresh air, not fond of reading, nor acquainted with the virtues of abstinence, his agreeableness at such times was rather of a negative than a positive

character ; for unless Martha would play or sing to him, or join him at the chess-board, or make herself more than usually entertaining, he was generally found, after the lapse of one hour, to be soundly asleep.

“And now,” said he, “you must get me out the chess-board, Martha, or I shall most assuredly disgrace myself before your visitor, for you must know I was up at five o’clock this morning, and I have been on horseback five hours to-day.”

“Now do let your chess alone this afternoon,” said Martha, “and make yourself agreeable for once.”

“Am I not always agreeable?” inquired Fleetwood, with a good-humoured laugh.

“You shall not have the chess-board, at all events,” said Martha, “unless you find it for yourself.”

At these words, Fleetwood rose lazily from his seat, and after looking in two or three of the most likely places he could think of, at last returned with what he sought ; while Mary, without a moment’s hesitation, seated herself opposite to him, and began to play, though not before she had cast one look of triumph back upon the defeated wife, as much as if to say—“I am setting you an example. This is the surest way to win a husband, and to keep his love.”

There was something in that look of Mary’s, which her friend did not altogether like ; and as the two sat together for some time intent upon the game, and then, animated by all the fluctuations of the most intense interest, exchanged expressions of playful and familiar meaning with each other, she began secretly to wish that she herself had been more complying ; while at the same time she wondered how her friend could be so suddenly and miraculously well : she wondered too, when she was

going away, for the evening was growing late for one in such delicate health to venture out ; and once she went to the door, and came back with the intelligence that a shower of snow was beginning to fall, and that the night was becoming extremely cold.

"Then you must stay," exclaimed Fleetwood, "until the shower is over, and by that time I shall have beaten you outright."

"It is not much at present," observed Martha, "only a slight sprinkling. I should rather think, from the blackness of the clouds, it was more likely to be worse, than better."

"It still freezes, I suppose?" said Mary.

"Oh ! yes," replied her friend, "it will be delightful walking for you, so long as the moon is clear."

"I must go—indeed I must !" exclaimed Mary. "There, you shall have my queen ; but remember I gave it you ;—for don't you hear Martha threatening me with a snow-storm to walk home in ?"

"Well ; since you have spoiled the game," said Fleetwood, "I will go out, and see for myself ;" and accordingly he also went to the door, to make his observations ; but quickly returned, saying, the evening looked rather threatening, he must confess, though he thought there would be ample time for Mary to reach home before the storm began.

"I am the more vexed," he added, "that it should have happened so to-night ; for it is quite out of my power to drive you in the phaeton, as one of my horses has been lame for the last month, and the other has gone to the village."

"Ah, that is the old story !" exclaimed Martha. "We might as well keep neither horse nor carriage."

Although the distance from Fleetwood to Mary's own residence was little more than a mile, when the state of the weather rendered it necessary to go by the public road, the way was considerably lengthened ; and on the evening already described, it certainly appeared rather a formidable undertaking for a delicate lady to travel that distance on foot. Still there is something rather exhilarating in the sharp frosty air of a winter's night, when the dry snow is falling light and still, and the ground, not yet covered with its white carpet, sounds crisp and hollow beneath the tread. There is something exhilarating, too, in being closely wrapped in warm furs, and supported by a firm and manly arm, with now and then the pleasant interchange of kind and cheerful jokes, upon the strangeness of the scene and place ; but above all, the animal spirits are exhilarated under such circumstances, by those domestic cordials which kind friends are ever ready to administer for the charitable purpose of keeping out the cold ; and our two travellers felt this as they went chatting on their way, occasionally laughing heartily at the mistakes they made between stile and gate, when the moon, as she now frequently did, hid her bright radiance behind a black and angry cloud.

At last, however, happily for them, the high-road was gained, and now there could be no more obstacle or doubt, unless, as they began to suspect, the falling snow should thicken, and the wind, which already blew in fearful gusts, should drive it in eddying whirls before their eyes. Convinced that they were encountering a much more fearful storm than they had anticipated, both became silent first, and then both expressed their fears that it would be impossible to proceed.

"What shall we do?" exclaimed Mary, after another

pause, during which the wind had actually driven them off the footpath by the side of the public road.

In answer to this question her companion could only laugh, which he did most heartily, because he knew not what else to do ; when suddenly recollecting himself, he said, " Keep on a little longer, and then I will tell you what we will do. We are, if I mistake not, only five minutes' walk from the Griffen. Ten chances to one but the good lady there will have some chaise or other vehicle which I can make friends with her to let me have ; and at all events, we shall be better at her warm fire than here."

Mary, who did not at first much relish this proposal, for want of a better alternative yielded a silent assent, and by the time she had struggled on against the storm a quarter of a mile farther, a much more humble edifice than the Griffen, and one even of more repulsive character, would have offered a welcome retreat to her on such a night.

Nor was it after all a resource to be despised, for the house in question was a large, respectable, and well-appointed hotel, upon a great public road, the whole internal arrangements of which were conducted by a lady, whose pleasing manners and general respectability no one called in question. But if on common occasions the lady of the house might be relied upon for the kindness and cordiality of her welcomes, on such a night as this, and to guests so honoured as the Squire of Fleetwood and his friend, her hospitality knew no bounds ; and they soon had the satisfaction of finding themselves located in the most comfortable room in her house, and seated before the brightest of all bright fires.

It may possibly be asked, where all this while were

Mary's strong prejudices against the husband of her friend? Had they vanished upon a nearer and more frequent view of his open and handsome countenance? No; Mary was proof against that—at least she believed herself to be so; but she was not proof against his cordial and never-failing kindness, shown in a thousand little acts of attention, to which she was so unused at home, that her heart was peculiarly alive to the impression they were so well calculated to make. She had learned to pity him too, and that goes a long way towards forgiveness of faults. She pitied him, that with such an intense capability as he possessed for what are commonly called enjoyments, those of his home should be so often imbittered to him by the rash and restless temper of his wife; and she wondered that Martha should be so cruel as not to permit her husband to be happy, when he seemed to require so little to make him so.

On the other hand, Mary, since her marriage, had learned to look with altered eyes upon those wonderful advantages of learning and talent which had previously reigned paramount in her esteem. Indeed a new existence had dawned upon her altogether. Indulged in her father's house to the extent of her wishes in all personal enjoyments, she had never attached much importance to the gratification such indulgences afforded, nor had she been in reality at all sensible of their mastery over her own mind. But in the cold and barren solitude of her own home, where she was compelled to cater for her own enjoyments, where she was sadly stinted in her means of procuring them, where they were alike unoffered and unshared, she began very naturally to think that what is called a "comfortable way of living," was no mean

thing to be weighed in the balance against dry learning and cold talent.

In this idea her friends at Fleetwood so cordially participated, that Mary, while seated at that plentiful board, or warming herself at the genial blaze of their social fire, had much to do with her rebellious heart, not to feel positively envious of Martha's happier lot; and not even the wild vagaries of Fleetwood and his dogs, nor all the accompaniments of horse and gun, of farmyard and stable, which he was not over scrupulous to keep behind the scenes, could repel her as they once did, or make her think otherwise than that he was a handsome man, with a kind and generous heart.

Nor was Mary herself changed only in her tastes. Her whole character was altered since her marriage; but more especially since she had learned that the stimulus which her doctor recommended as being so necessary to assist the proper action of the animal functions, was equally necessary to give cheerfulness and animation to the mind. Thus there were moments when Mary was absolutely lively, and almost entertaining, when she took the lead in conversation, said smart things, and was so open, communicative, and confiding, that it would have been impossible for friends naturally so social as Fleetwood and Martha, not to have been delighted with her society. Beyond this, they were glad too to listen to the descriptions she gave them of her own household discomfort, and, according to the mood she was in at the moment, they either laughed at the ludicrous, or compassionated the deplorable. It might be a serious question here, to ask whether Mary would have told half these stories of domestic discomfort, if she had never had her heart

opened by artificial stimulus ; and a still more serious question, whether she ought to have told them at all.

But to return to the comfortable fireside at the inn. The wind now blew a perfect hurricane ; but what was the storm without to those who sat within the glow of that bright hearth ? Something more than warming themselves, however, must be done—to pay for the accommodation they were enjoying. The usual means were resorted to, for getting rid of the burden of this obligation ; and as Fleetwood sipped his brandy-and-water, having discovered that the snow on Mary's shoes had melted before the fire, and that her feet must consequently be dangerously damp, he insisted upon her taking a cordial of equal potency, "*just to keep out the cold.*"

After a great deal of protesting and resisting, accompanied with too much laughter and playfulness to admit of its being taken in earnest, Mary took the glass in her hand ; and, considering the dislike she had professed for its contents, it was rather remarkable, that when placed upon the table again, it should be quite empty ; but this act of self-mastery was no doubt performed with the magnanimous intention of "*keeping out the cold.*"

It is scarcely necessary to say, that after these sage precautions had been taken, Fleetwood and Mary were both disposed to be more communicative than before ; and as the storm still raged, and the conveyance which had been promised them would not be available for half an hour to come, they made the best they could of present circumstances, by entering into a more familiar dissertation upon their separate and individual experience, than they had ever done before. On this occasion, Fleetwood for the first time called Mary by her name. The sound startled her. She looked up, and the steady gaze

of his fine eyes fixed upon her face startled her still more.

"Mary," said he, "you knew Martha from a child—you knew her when she was not harassed by her own family, but happy and at peace as she must always have been in her private intercourse with you—tell me whether she was always irritable and impatient as she is now, or whether it is I who have made her so?"

"You?" exclaimed Mary, "Martha would have been the same under any circumstances. She always was, and I fear she always will be, the same; but she has a good heart."

"The more's the pity;" replied the husband, in a voice so sad, that Mary could not answer him again.

"I'll tell you what, Mary," he went on, "I'll tell you what I have never mentioned to any human being. I often think of making my escape altogether, and going to some new country, where I can live a life of liberty at least."

"And leaving your wife and child?"

"Yes; leaving them with all my property at their disposal; for what am I to them? It is impossible, morally impossible, that any woman should love the man she treats as Martha treats me; and by the time that child is old enough to see and think for himself, I shall have become, if I stay here, either a slave, or, what is worse—a tyrant. I tell you I cannot, and I will not endure it."

"Have you ever told Martha so?"

"Yes, a hundred times."

"And what does she say?"

"She says she has the most to bear of the two, and I know that sometimes I am provoking enough; but then

she is always at it, taunting me with things that are past and done with, until I think I shall absolutely go mad. Here, waiter, bring me another glass of brandy-and-water."

By the time Fleetwood had refreshed himself again, the conveyance which had been ordered was at the door, and Mary soon found herself in the delicate situation of being compelled either to withdraw the sympathy she had already so cordially expressed, or to suffer the affectionate pressure of a hand, in which her own had no business to be placed.

Without saying exactly which alternative Mary adopted, it is more to the purpose of the writer, to point out this, as one of many thousands of instances occurring in human life, in which the health, and vigour, and uprightness of the mind, are sacrificed to an imaginary zeal for the preservation of the body. Of what importance, I would ask the reader, is a cold, even if it must be incurred, compared with an act of folly or of guilt? Of what importance is a fit of indisposition, though that such must be the alternative is a very questionable fact? Of what importance is an illness, when compared with an indiscretion? Is it not better a thousand times to be confined to the house with a clear conscience, than to go about in perfect health with the consciousness of having become involved in a train of difficulties, all arising out of imprudences committed in unguarded moments, when the mind had voluntarily relinquished its power of correctly discriminating the minor shades of right and wrong?

And, after all, how many of the most serious ills of human life, more especially in the experience of woman, arise entirely out of that complicated tissue of imaginary

good, and real evil, which her warm fancy, and her rash judgment, together weave. I believe it is no exaggeration of the truth to say, that one half of the evil doings of women, have not been intended to be such, they have not indeed in any sense been acts of deliberate intention, but have grown as it were out of circumstances, which the uncalculating indiscretion of unguarded moments had brought about. At such times, how often has a secret been betrayed which nothing but a falsehood could arrest in its further progress—how often has a friend been injured, whose anger nothing could avert except the inculcation of a second party—how often has a complaint been listened to, which afterwards grew up into the betrayal of confidence; or, more frequent and more fatal than all, how often has a channel been opened for the interchange of feelings, which from that time have flowed on like a flood, too powerful for any subsequently erected barrier to restrain!

Yet to all these, and to an interminable catalogue of other evils, amongst which “one were enough” to embitter a whole life—to all these, imprudent women will subject themselves, by administering to the body a transient stimulus at the risk of the immortal mind—by warding off a cold, an ache, a momentary weakness, by a deleterious drug, which possesses the dangerous property of enlivening the fancy, and exciting the feelings, just in proportion as it impairs the judgment, and incapacitates the will.

To say nothing of the awful responsibilities which relate to the life to come, I would ask again, Is this a world in which to peril reputation by such risks? Are we so firmly established in the good opinion of our friends, so safe from the breath of scandal, or so sure of

the most charitable construction being put upon our actions, that we can afford to lay aside a little of our power of discriminating good from evil—a little of our delicate perception of the fitness of time and place, and the adaptation of our own words and actions to both—a little of our conscience—a little of our power of self-mastery; and to add in exchange, just so much as we have deducted from these safe and wholesome checks to human conduct, to our imagination, our impetuosity, and our self-will? Until woman is so constituted as to afford to do this, she never can be safely the partaker of those stimulants which are so erroneously regarded as necessary to the preservation of the body from suffering and disease.

On arriving at her own door that night, Mary looked up to the windows of the study, and saw that the accustomed light was burning there. Fleetwood looked up too, and as he handed her from the carriage, he said in a half whisper, again glancing up at the window, "Happy man! you at least can welcome home your wife without any anticipation of a scold!"

"If," said Mary, as they stood together on the steps of the door, after the bell had been rung, "you regard me as happier than yourself, remember, when you think of me, that the grave itself could scarcely open to me with more gloom than the door of my own home. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Fleetwood, as he stepped back into the carriage. The servant closed the door after her mistress, and in another moment Mary was seated before the wasting embers of a dull fire, in the little parlour, which looked as if it had not been visited since her departure in the morning. A long fit of musing was

the state into which she fell, after placing her feet upon the fender, and renewing the feeble light. And what was the nature of her meditations, as she sat there, without interruption until the clock struck twelve? That her thoughts were not those of pleasure, or even of satisfaction, might easily have been surmised, from the perturbed and anxious expression of her brow, as she alternately pressed it with her hand, and then swept aside her careless curls, as if with that involuntary movement she could clear away some cloud, or wipe off some impression which left behind either a shadow or a stain.

Once or twice during the course of this long and melancholy reverie, the attention of Mary was diverted for an instant by a sound which had lately become too familiar to awaken much emotion. It was the regular pacing to and fro of the student in the apartment above her head, and on this night she thought his step was quicker, and less certain, than usual; but it might be only that her own pulse was quick, and that her temples throbbed with the expiring tumult of that excitement which left nothing agreeable or consolatory behind. So far from this, the consciousness now grew upon her, that she had been acting a false, as well as a foolish part; false to her friend, false to her husband, and false to the womanly pride and purity of her own character. Yet to retrace her steps, and remedy the evil, seemed now impossible; for the more she thought, the more she endeavoured to collect and define the occurrences of the day, the less there appeared to be of a definite or certain nature to lay hold of, and set apart for avoidance in the future. Perhaps it never once occurred to Mary, on summing up the uncomfortable sensations which closed

the experience of the last few hours, that if she had kept her head more clear, her pulse more slow, and her heart more cool, she might have reverently on her knees implored a blessing upon the transactions of the day, instead of shrinking, as she now did, from the repulsive picture which their combined absurdities displayed.

CHAP. VI.

THE TWO FRIENDS

WHEN a husband or a wife has once given way to the treacherous habit of complaining of domestic grievances to a third party, the natural channel of home-confidence is proportionately dried up.

From the time of the stormy evening already described, when Fleetwood allowed himself to make a confidant of the friend of his wife, he was, in his domestic character, an altered man. Martha herself was so frank, and so perfectly sincere, that he could not meet her flashing eye without feeling that he had wronged her; and, without confessing what his fault had been, without even regarding it as a fault when seriously considered, he gradually estranged himself from her society, and, seeking that of his inferiors, who, on every hand were ready, not only to meet, but to court his favour, he fell into low habits of indulgence and excess, which his wife alternately strove to restrain by the most unsparing reproaches, and alternately wept over with a violence proportioned to her indignation. But still, though the intimacy with Mary existed, and though she came often, and often walked home accompanied by Fleetwood, Martha, unlike her friend, never made her husband the subject of serious or intentional complaint. Into whatever indiscretion she

might be betrayed by the provocation of the moment, nothing could wring from her a deliberate charge, or even an allowance before others that he was not all she wished. That her high spirits were sinking under the pressure of some secret load, was but too evident from her altered appearance ; but she was naturally abstemious, and having learned that a temperament like hers needed no artificial stimulus, she never trusted herself to the power of those sensations, whose influence she well knew would be liable to render her still more hasty and imprudent than she was.

When urged to partake with her husband, and her friend, Martha would often say, “ I don’t know how it is with you, but for my part, I find enough to do to manage my temper without any additional excitement ; and if the sins you had to answer for, committed in your sober moments, were anything like mine, you would find enough to do without incurring the bare risk of unconsciously adding to their number.”

Neither of the parties to whom these expressions were addressed, were, however, very likely to benefit by them. Both had gone too far, in establishing the habit, to lay down the practice of it without some powerfully operating motive, and both unfortunately found their motives operating too powerfully in the opposite way. It is true Mary was sometimes startled for a moment from the moral stupor into which she had fallen ;—it is true she sometimes looked around her with alarm, on asking the fearful question, to what must all this tend ? But she consoled herself, as thousands have done besides, by taking again the soothing draught, which if it did not make her actually forget her troubles, enabled her to bear them with more apparent ease.

Yes, it is true she was sometimes startled for a moment from her fatal dream ; and seldom more suddenly, than one day as she sat alone in her little parlour, her head leaning on her hand, and her eyes fixed intently upon the pages of a novel, which she was the more greedily devouring, that its successor lay unopened on the sofa beside her.

" Mary !" said a hoarse deep voice, which might have come out of the earth at her feet, so little was she prepared for such an interruption ; " Mary," said her husband, and looking round, she saw him leaning over the back of her chair, while stooping down his head to a level with her ear, he pronounced her name again.

" Go on," said Mary, " and tell me what you want."

" I want you to help me," was the reply.

Mary looked up, for it was so long since this request had been made, and made in vain, that she was at a loss to imagine what the renewal of it now could mean, and fixing her eyes more earnestly upon her husband, she saw that his hair was dishevelled, his eye unusually bright, and his whole countenance like that of a person who has ceased to sleep, or to find rest. Almost for the first time in her life, her heart was touched with pity for one who seemed to be living beyond the pale of human fellowship, alike without its sympathies and its consolations.

" You know," replied Mary, with more feeling in her voice than it was wont to betray on such occasions, " that I cannot help you, even if I would."

Melville clasped his hands together with an air of distraction, and then exclaimed : " Two years have now elapsed—two precious years, in which you might have qualified yourself fully for the work. Two months, if I

could command them, would see the labour of my life completed; already the goal is in view—the glorious termination of all my hopes—and yet, I shall never reach it.”

“Why not?” exclaimed Mary, beginning to be alarmed.

“My head,” replied Melville, and he dashed his hand across his brow in a hurried and impatient manner, and then laughed, as if at his own childishness.

“You do not take sufficient exercise,” observed Mary; “you are growing nervous and restless. I should strongly advise you to make a practice of walking, at least for one hour, every day,”

“Walk!” exclaimed Melville, somewhat wildly; “do I not walk, night and day? Come up into my room, and you shall see how much I walk.”

Determined to fall in with his present humour, so long as nothing very arduous was required of her, Mary followed her husband up stairs, and on entering his study, she saw what convinced her, that if mere walking could have preserved either the health of his mind or his body, he would have little to apprehend from the farther prosecution of his work; for directly along the centre of the room, from one window to the other, the mark of his footsteps might be traced upon the carpet, which in one narrow line was nearly worn through.

“What a life is yours!” exclaimed Mary, with an involuntary shudder, as she glanced around the room, every corner of which was piled up with books and papers; some retaining a compact and regular form, while others had slid down to mingle with other masses of literary lumber on the floor.

Actuated by a faint impulse to render him some

assistance, though not of the kind he had solicited, Mary went on to assure her husband that she had just thought of something to do him good.

“What is that?” he asked incredulously.

“You shall leave this miserable den for a few weeks, and I will have it all put in order for you against your return.”

It was not exactly a shriek which Melville uttered as his wife said this, but a sound escaped his lips, at once as expressive of surprise as of indignation. His feelings then burst forth in language as rapid as it was vehement; while he descanted upon the merits of unremitting application, and the importance of that great object which he was about to achieve.

When once her husband had fallen into this strain, Mary knew by experience there would be little use in attempting any other, or even in adverting to those strange looks and words which at first had startled her into more than usual interest; she therefore made her escape as soon as it was possible to do so, and, resuming her accustomed place in the parlour, endeavoured to lose herself again in the story she had been reading.

In vain, however, did the fictitious scenes of the novel flit before her; the living and palpable reality she had just witnessed had left too vivid an impression to be obliterated by anything another's fancy might conjure up. That look—that voice—so strangely wild, so hurried and impetuous, and so unlike the accustomed manner of the thoughtful student—what could that change portend? Again and again Mary persuaded herself it all meant nothing, but simply that the mind of her husband was a little overdone, that rest would make all right again; and she even formed plans of future kindness for the



H. Beckwith

The Reconciliation

purpose of drawing him out from his study, to enjoy with her, the benefit of exercise and pure fresh air. Yet, pleasant as these consoling reflections were, and especially that portion of them which lulled her conscience into a belief that she was really about to begin a new life, and to be more attentive to her duties as a wife, all would not do; for again, and again, she seemed to hear that voice, with its deep hoarse tones beside her ear, and looking round to be sure that the apparition of her husband was not beside her, she seemed to realize again the spectre of his weary jaded figure, his long neglected hair, and the unnatural brightness which shot from his wild and wandering eye.

While Mary struggled alternately against these impressions, and then yielded up her mind to all the vague but real horrors they were calculated to produce, her friend Martha was spending a day not more distinctly marked by the satisfaction which arises from a conscience void of offence.

Fleetwood had risen that morning with some compunctious visitings, which he felt half-inclined to lay before his wife. With this notion, scarcely definite enough to be called a purpose, he had lingered beside her later than usual after their morning's meal; he had even followed her into the nursery when the servants went down to breakfast, and, delighted with the apparent recovery of the child who had been ill, he had entered into its little sports with all the fondness of a father. And all this while, the mother, little thinking what was in her husband's heart, but treasuring up against him all the offences of the past week, concerning which she had not yet fully spoken out;—all this while, Martha, regarding

herself as an injured woman, sat apart, nor condescended to join in the pleasant pastime that was going on.

"Are you not well to-day, Martha?" asked Fleetwood kindly.

"Whether I am well or ill," replied Martha, "makes very little difference to any one."

"Yes, it does;" said her husband; "it makes a great deal of difference to me, and especially to-day, for I was about to ask you to go with me to dine at my friend Ashley's."

"Yes, and come home with you as you came the last time we were there!" exclaimed Martha, while flashes of fiery indignation kindled in her eye.

"Martha," said Fleetwood, very gravely, "you are too hard upon me. The honest truth is this; I was going to show you that I could master myself so far, as to come home, even from Ashley's, in a state in which you need not be ashamed of me."

"I must see this before I can believe it," murmured Martha.

"That is the very reason why I want you to come with me," replied her husband good-humouredly.

"Not for the pleasure of my company then," retorted the wife, without the least inclination to a smile.

"Why, unless you make your company a little more agreeable than it is sometimes," observed Fleetwood, whose patience was now exhausted, "I should scarcely think of asking you for that. In one word, will you go, or not?"

"I will *not* go to-day," said Martha, in that blunt and determined manner which renders a refusal doubly ungracious.

Fleetwood murmured something between his clenched teeth, and immediately left the room ; while his wife, like a very woman, had no sooner heard the sound of his retreating steps, as he hurried through the hall, than she began to repent of her folly and imprudence. More than once she went to the window to see whether he had taken his horse and ridden out, and it is more than probable, that had he looked up from the court below, and caught her eye as she stood there, she would have beckoned him to come again and hear her recant the last hard sentence which had driven him away. It was now so seldom too that he asked her to accompany him anywhere. It was a thousand pities not to have tried him this once ; besides which, the day was fine, and she felt rather disposed for a little turn out, since the child was so much better.

These thoughts, and many more of the same tendency, flew quickly through the mind of Martha as she stood and gazed in almost hopeless wonder at the course her husband could have taken in his exit from the house. At last, the trampling of a horse was heard distinctly in the court, and Martha flew down stairs ; some trifling impediment occurred to hinder her progress ; to save time, she therefore hastened to a nearer door ; it had not been opened that day, and while her busy hands were undoing bolt after bolt, she could hear her husband giving his last orders to his men, as if he intended to be out all day.

"I shall be too late," exclaimed Martha, as she tried again at a rusty lock ; and Oh ! what a feeling is that with which we seize the last moment—the very last we can hope for, to make atonement for our transgressions. "I *am* too late," she cried again, as the door flew open, and she saw the fleet animal on which her husband rode,

going at its utmost speed through the avenue which led to the public road.

How much Martha would have given at that moment for one word, or one look of reconciliation, it is impossible to say. For some time, she stood in an attitude of despair, like a statue rooted to the spot; when, suddenly recollecting herself, she turned back and retraced her steps through the hall, examining every place where her husband had been, to see whether he had prepared himself for a long or a short absence from home.

It is no unfrequent thing, after wilfully offending one person, that we are doubly amiable to another; and never were the caresses which Martha lavished upon her child, more cordial, or more affectionate, than on this day. Indeed, the child was one to have won the interest and the love even of a stranger; how much more then, of the fond mother, who had lately watched over him in his illness, feeling, with all a woman's fears, the trembling apprehension that she should lose him for ever. There was something too in the very innocence of the child which made him doubly dear.—He had not yet learned to look with discerning eyes upon the conduct of his mother; to him she was yet all lovely, and all perfect; and therefore she might fold him to her bosom, without fear that he would shrink from the lurking mischief which was sometimes harboured there.

On this day especially, Martha seemed to be making amends for all the sins of temper which she had committed during the past month, by devoting herself entirely, and in the most amiable and winning manner, to the capricious fancies of her child; and a beautiful morning it was, as they strolled together along the garden and the fields, gathering violets from the hedge-

row bank, and listening to the song of the merry birds in the branches over head. Once or twice, a cold shivering seemed to creep over the child as he played ; and at the same instant, he threw down his flowers, and, with drooping lip and tearful eyes, concealed his face in his mother's shawl ; but the apparent chill passed off as suddenly as it had come on, and he played and laughed again the next moment, as if he had neither a thought nor a feeling but of joy.

At last, however, the mother began to suspect either that the air was too keen, or the ground too damp, and raising the child in her arms, she became convinced that all was not right. With trembling and uncertain steps she hastened back to the house, but ere she reached the door, a strange, unearthly shriek had escaped from the lips of the child, and looking in his face, she saw that blue convulsive countenance which is almost more appalling than the rigid aspect of death.

In all places, and on all occasions, Martha was accustomed to yield herself entirely to the feelings of the moment, whatever they might be ; it was, therefore, a frantic and absorbing agony with which her heart was wrung, as she watched the changing countenance of her boy, alternately distorted by strange movements, and then fixed and cold, as if the last faint breath had passed from out his pale and parted lips. The mother was alone, too, except that her domestics were at hand, offering such consolation as the ignorant have to give, which is often but the harrowing up of poignant regrets, and the mingling of dark thoughts with fearful apprehensions—she was alone, for she had driven away from her, him who ought to have been her support and stay in such an hour of need.

To send immediately for her husband, was naturally the first idea which crossed the mind of the distracted mother; but where to find him was a question not easily solved. Messengers however were sent out in different directions, and in the mean time there was ample opportunity for Martha to look back, as with a glance of lightning, into the long vista of the past; and forward, into a future, which she dared not dream of now, without the cherub smile of her sweet and happy child.

If the life or the happiness of those we love, could be purchased by our promises, by what vows should we bind ourselves in such moments as these? Could the mother, as she stood by the couch of her child, have brought it back to health by any sacrifice or mastery of self, there could not have been an act of penance proposed to her, however hard, to which she would not eagerly have pledged herself at that moment—nay, more, she would have bound herself by the most solemn vow, never again, through the whole course of her future life, to speak a word of anger or resentment, let her provocations be what they might. Nor were such thoughts entirely absent from her mind; for, in the prayers she offered up, the natural and often-recurring impression was, that, as a guilty offender against a just and holy law, she was about to be called upon to suffer the execution of a righteous sentence, in thus yielding up the treasure of her soul. And yet, just as she felt the sentence was, her heart rebelled against it, and she ventured to pray, again and again, that she might be tried once more; that the joy of her life—the ‘delight of her eyes,’—might be spared to her a little longer, on any condition, however hard to fulfil—on any terms, however binding to herself.

And in all this, the distracted mother was perfectly

sincere for the time. She only forgot one essential point in the practicability of her scheme. She forgot that it is impossible to take up at will any particular mode of conduct as the rule of life. She forgot that principle must be at the foundation of all radical improvement, and that the heart itself must be changed, before the habits can be altered for the better.

Robert Fleetwood had set out from home that morning, with the vague intention of one, whose object is simply to get rid of himself, and his own thoughts. With this design, he had pursued an accustomed course towards a place which had been the scene of many of his most desperate attempts of this nature, both alone, and in society congenial to such a purpose. It might be, however, that the beauty of the day beguiled him, or that the hour was yet too early for the execution of this design ; for, suddenly recollecting that he had business in a neighbouring town, he struck off into a private road, and crossing over into a different line, rode on at a brisk pace, endeavouring to forget what he had left behind, in the exhilaration of the exercise, and the freshness of the morning air.

Arrived at the town where his business lay, Fleetwood found many things to detain him there—the news-room to visit, the corn-exchange to attend, and a friend to dine with in the afternoon—each, and all, presenting to his mind resources far more attractive than an angry pouting wife, and a home in which he could not move without the risk of bringing upon himself a storm of passionate words. With the circumstances of the morning but too vividly impressed upon his memory, it was not likely that he should feel particularly anxious about hastening back ; and as the evening closed in, and the friends with

whom he was so comfortably located urged him to prolong his stay, he was many times on the point of consenting to remain their guest until the following day.

The lady of the house, however, seemed not so urgent as her lord, and she even went so far as to observe, upon his pressing invitation, that she could not trust herself to say how much pleasure she should derive from the company of Mr. Fleetwood, because she knew that in the situation of his wife, in that lonely place, she should not thank any one who kept her husband away for the night.

"You are right!" exclaimed Fleetwood, starting from his chair; and in another half-hour, he was riding rapidly along the road towards his own house.

Arrived at the bottom of the avenue which led up the hill on which his mansion stood, he naturally looked up to see what lights were yet shining in the windows; and seeing that one was in the nursery, his thoughts turned with all a father's fondness to his child.

"Why—why are we not happy?" said he, as he rode slowly up the hill; for somehow or other, there was always an involuntary check upon his speed as he drew near that spot, while a certain sickness of the heart, not easily described, though too well understood by those who have felt it, often detained him lingering without the door, when a happier man would have been eagerly seeking the rest and comfort of his own fire-side.

And perhaps, as in the case of Fleetwood, this sickness of the heart is more keenly felt in circumstances which, but for one alloy, seem to be created and combined for the purpose of giving happiness. Where penury and wretchedness prevail, where the home is desolate and the domestic hearth a ruin; where calamity assumes an evident and palpable form, the sufferer almost uniformly

feels within him a secret strength to meet and combat with his difficulties; or, what is happier still, a secret spirit of submission—gentle, and calm, and purifying to the bosom where it dwells. It is then, that as the poet has truly said :

“ Sweet are the uses of adversity.”

But when all wears the outward impress of prosperity and peace; where plenty smiles, and beauty blooms around; where home is the very spot of all the world where the heart could, if it might, find rest; when the serpent venom of discord and disunion has scattered its poison there, it is then that the rightful occupant of that home seems to be in reality shut out; and let his worldly possessions be what they may, he feels within himself that he is houseless, joyless, friendless, and alone.

The sound of his horse's hoofs was no sooner heard upon the gravel at the door, than the master of Fleetwood was met by all his servants at once; some bearing lights, and others hastening back as if with some intelligence of the utmost moment to those within.

“ What is the matter ?” he asked eagerly, for the grave countenances of those around him soon communicated their own anxious feelings. “ Is your mistress at home and well ?” he continued; to which question he obtained no other answer than—“ Yes, but —” from half-a-dozen voices at once.

“ But what ?” exclaimed Fleetwood impatiently.

“ The child — ” replied an old servant in an undertone, and as if afraid even that low sound should occasion some disturbance.

Fleetwood asked no more. It would have been more intolerable to him to hear the truth from such informers

than to see it for himself; he therefore dismounted, and giving his hat to one domestic, and his whip to another, as if to keep them detained below, he walked directly into the chamber in which he had seen the light at that unusual hour.

In this apartment all was still, except for the deep sobs of the mother, who knelt beside her child, with her face buried in her hands, and who, even when he spoke to her, and spoke kindly, seemed incapable of looking up or meeting his inquiring eye. The nurse, by habit more communicative, and naturally less absorbed, readily explained all; while the afflicted father approaching his apparently lifeless child, stooped down to ascertain whether he had actually breathed his last.

“He is not gone yet!” said he, “and while there’s life, there’s hope.”

By a gentle transition from the almost marble cheek of the infant, Fleetwood touched the hand of his weeping wife, and by a pressure that would scarcely have been perceptible to one whose heart was not keenly alive to the faintest expression of sympathy, he conveyed to her, without the aid of words, all, and more than the tenderest words could have told.

Martha could now look up. It was her wayward, her too often ill-used husband, who bent over her; and in another instant, her arms were around his neck, and her tears were falling on his bosom.

Long, long was that embrace, and eloquent and sincere was the confession which Martha uttered, where the confession of a penitent wife should ever be made, pressed closely to the heart she had wounded, but would gladly, fondly, and effectually heal. And eloquent too were the

promises uttered there ; promises which she would willingly have crowded years into a moment, in order to fulfil at once.

And well might she wish for such strange power of compression in order to do this ; for, alas ! it is that tyrant time which steals away our better resolutions by imperceptible degrees, leaving us to wonder at the utter dissolution of the mighty fabric which in some moment of trial or excitement we had built up, fondly believing it sufficiently powerful to withstand all the blasts of adversity, all the waters of affliction. Nor is it, after all, so often from the storm without or the violence within, that such resolutions fail ; it is from the surprise of some unexpected foe, some attack from a puerile enemy, made in seasons of weakness and security ; but, above all, from the quiet inward eating of the canker of time, which destroys the strength and the soundness of the edifice we had so proudly raised.

It would have been impossible, at the moment we have described, for Martha to believe that she could ever sin against her husband by her petulance or unkindness again ; that she could ever drive him from his home, or meet him on his return without a welcome as cordial as the kiss she gave him now. Nay, so entirely beyond her belief did such a cold and joyless future appear to her now, that she even doubted of the past, and to supply that consolation of which the present was so much in need, she tried to persuade herself that the dark picture left upon her memory was but a troubled dream. In fact, how could it have been otherwise with such a world of love as she had now to offer ?—such fountains of unutterable kindness—such depths of tenderness and devotion ? No, she would never more look back, but onward, onward

into a bright world, where every thought and every feeling of her own should be, how to minister to and bless the object of her love.

Nor were the resolutions of the mother weakened on finding that a ray of hope now fluttered, like the wing of a hovering dove, above the life of her child. She rather, with a fond but natural conceit, believed that her prayers had been heard, that her vows had been accepted; and, without venturing to express the secret confidence which now inspired her with fresh energy, she applied herself again to the means of restoration, which her medical adviser had recommended her to adopt. In this manner the night was spent, and when morning again dawned, it was announced to the household, that the child had fallen into a peaceful and healthy sleep.

And a happy woman was Martha on that day, and on many succeeding days of her life, as with a light step and a joyous heart she visited that chamber, receiving every time fresh confirmation of her glowing hopes, and hearing often, as she entered, the wild and joyous laugh which welcomed her approach, and those sweet broken sounds of growing consciousness, which already constituted a language sacred to herself, and her happy boy. Had Martha been a deep thinker, she would have known it was slippery ground on which she now stood—she would have felt, that the life which had so recently hung suspended by a thread, might at any time be snatched away; and more than all, she would have remembered, that the happiness which has once been wrecked, may not wisely be trusted again upon the same ocean, in the same bark, and with no better pilot than before. But the mother was scarcely less impetuous, sanguine, and devoid of apprehension than her own

child ; and, therefore, what she so earnestly desired, she as fervently believed,—that coming years would glide on with her and hers, as smoothly, and as pleasantly, as the passing moments glided now.

It was during these days of felicity, for they were nothing less, that Mary came over to Fleetwood to congratulate her friend upon the recovery of the child ; nor was it difficult to discover, from the first glance of the mother's eye, what was the degree of exultation with which she was rejoicing ; but this was easily accounted for, by the restoration of the boy to almost perfect health ; and Martha had previously determined within herself, not to allow so sacred a thing as her own reconciliation with her husband to escape her lips, even in communicating with her bosom friend. A gift of speech, however, like Martha's, is a dangerous talent when the heart is full ; and before she had been seated with her friend for half an hour, recounting the most striking incidents of the past week, she had told, with alternate smiles and tears, of the happy state of things existing between her husband and herself. Whether this disclosure was a breach of confidence or not, it was, on her part, one which involved no blame to another ; and here she set a noble example to her friend, by speaking of herself as being alone in fault, and of her husband, as the best-hearted, most generous, and most amiable of men.

While dwelling with delighted interest upon this story, Martha did not quite forget her accustomed observance of the timepiece ; and, as if the husband of whom she spoke, had no identity with the man who had promised not to be too late for dinner, she bit her lip, and knit her brow, every time she rose up to look out, and see whether Fleetwood was riding up the avenue.

We must, however, do Martha the justice to say, that on this occasion she was not without cause for irritation, for company had been invited to tea; and when, in such cases, dinner is unnecessarily delayed much beyond the appointed time, it does require an extraordinary degree of patience to await, in perfect sweetness of temper, the return of the individual transgressor, by whom this concatenation of evils is brought about.

Had Martha been told, on the eventful day of her affliction, that such an event as a dinner-hour delayed could ever interfere with the fulfilment of those vows, so fervently and devoutly made, she would have rejected the idea as alike impossible to be realized, and unworthy to be entertained. But now, though a week had scarcely passed since then, she stood, with heightened colour and impatient air, alternately glancing at the road, and then again at the timepiece; or sometimes she hurried out amongst her servants, to see to the execution of some orders for the evening, and to murmur, as such ladies are apt to do, in a kind of under tone, as if the very indistinctness of their utterance, preserved them from the sin of unfaithful or injurious conduct against their rightful lords.

Fleetwood himself had been that day detained by unexpected and important business, and when at last liberated and riding briskly homeward, on recollecting the state of affairs at his own house, he could not but regret that he had omitted to request Martha to dine without him, that so her domestic arrangements might not have been disturbed.

"This time, however," said he, as he spurred his horse afresh, "my own conscience is clear;" and as his wife had lately been so amiable, and so evidently under

the influence of altered and better feelings, he had no apprehension but that his cause would be heard at least with fairness, and that he should be rather pitied than blamed for an offence which was so far from having been a matter of choice.

Fortified by these considerations, the master of Fleetwood walked deliberately into his own hall, and asking the first servant he saw there to send her mistress to him, employed himself in removing some articles of his riding dress. His request to see the mistress of the house appeared to have been promptly attended to, for scarcely had the servant disappeared at one door, than Martha entered at another, with a perfect storm upon her countenance, which at once deterred him from attempting to speak in his own defence; for there is something in the dignity of man which often induces him to bear in silence the most violent attack, especially from woman, rather than condescend to defend himself from an unjust and injurious charge.

It would require no trifling number of pages to record all which Martha's eloquent lips found ability to utter on this occasion, comprising descriptions of all the combined disasters of dinner and tea company being jumbled together; all the disorder of her household, and the distress of her own mind; with all the offences of the same nature which her husband had committed since the luckless day of their marriage.

And all this while Fleetwood was perfectly silent, engaged in deliberately taking off one thing after another, and apparently without the least emotion, bestowing each individual article in its proper place. Nor was it the least of Martha's provocations, that when at last he did speak, it was simply to tell her, in the

coolest manner possible, that she might have spared all her disgraceful passion, for if she had known his reasons for staying away, she would rather have commended than blamed him.

"Then why did you not tell me that sooner?" exclaimed Martha, more irritated than ever at having been thus allowed to fall into an unnecessary exposure of her temper.

"For the very best reason in the world," replied Fleetwood; "because you would not give me time."

And thus the happy couple went on, until impatient servants came to announce that dinner was on the table; and the little party sat down with what appetite they could command, to partake of refreshments in no small degree embittered by the last scene exhibited on the domestic stage.

It seemed as if the mere act of once breaking through the law she had laid down for herself in her better moments, had given a license to Martha to go on sinning in the same way. And thus it often is, where an improvement in conduct is based merely upon human will, without that support of principle, and that dependence upon Divine assistance, which when combined, are found to constitute the only lasting and sure foundation of what is either amiable or virtuous.

And never is this more striking than in the case of temper, which with all who are constitutionally liable to sudden ebullitions, with whom the will has not been subdued in childhood, and whose bodily functions seem also to be linked into a fearful combination with the activity of the mind, so as to produce at any moment a humiliating explosion of disgraceful passion; with such there is indeed most urgent cause for their seeking

assistance beyond themselves, to subdue their mortal enemy ; and even where this may not, even to the end of life, have been wholly effected, such persons will often have found the need, and have felt the consolation, of having made what atonement they could, by frankly and humbly confessing their error where offence has been committed, and kindly endeavouring to heal the wounds they have inflicted upon others.

III.

M

CHAP. VII.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

AMONGST the most serious causes of anxiety which pressed upon the mind of Mary Melville, was a constant, and now increasing, apprehension, that her husband's pecuniary resources would fail before the entire completion of the great work, which was at once to establish his reputation as an author, and to ensure his comfort as a man of independent circumstances. He had himself expressed his belief, that, in the course of two months, his utmost hopes would be attained, provided only his health would hold out; but so critical did the present state of his affairs altogether appear, that Mary, in her most serious moments, began almost to regret that she had never given her mind to render him what assistance she could, in his prolonged and arduous task.

There were other reasons, too, why Mary felt more on this subject than she trusted herself to express. A small though sufficient sum, which her father supposed himself to have secured for the maintenance of her mother and herself, in case of his own death, had recently been lost through the failure of a bank; and Mary knew too well the habits of indulgence contracted by her mother, to suppose that any bequest her father might now make, would do more than supply her necessities, if indeed

there were any hope of its doing so much as that. Her sole dependence, therefore, was upon her husband's scheme of fame and aggrandizement; and as the time drew near for its completion, her own anxiety was little less than his, especially as she saw more clearly every day, that both his bodily and mental powers were overwrought.

Nor was Mary altogether insensible to the unequal division of labour, which fell so hardly upon one whose frame had never been robust. She was sometimes almost shocked at her own uselessness and indolence, when compared with his indefatigable toil; and the more she saw of what could be effected by the constant application of one unaided mind, the more she felt the culpability of having allowed her own mental powers so entirely to run to waste. These thoughts, however, if such they might be called, were but like dreams, in their vague and unproductive character; for so far from improving upon the past, Mary only strove to lay the fearful spectre of the future, whenever it appeared in any repulsive or unwelcome form, by that peculiar mode of soothing a troubled conscience, to which allusion has already been sufficiently made. Not that Mary could, by any perversion of popular phraseology, have been called intemperate. Far from it. She was delicate and lady-like in all her indulgences, and would have shrunk with inconceivable horror from the bare idea of exceeding the limits of propriety in this. It was simply from the portion of this medicine recommended by her doctor, and the additional portion which experience had taught her to believe was as necessary to the mind, as the other was to the body, that she had become an altered being, having learned to throw off for a time the burden of existence, and to look with cheerfulness upon

the unattractive features of her daily lot. It was so pleasant, too, to feel lively, to be talkative, and what is called agreeable in company—to rise, though but for a moment, above her circumstances, and to look the future in the face. It was so pleasant to go over to Fleetwood, to be cherished and indulged and made comfortable there. It was so pleasant to laugh and jest with the husband of her friend, and all these things Mary could do without an effort, when stimulated by artificial means ; while, on the other hand, no sooner did this stimulus fail, than she sunk into the most profound melancholy, varied only by a restless impatience to get rid of her troubles—nay, to get rid of her very life.

With this vague hope of escaping from enemies, whose pursuit was eager in proportion with her own desire to elude their power, it was but natural that Mary should seize every opportunity of sharing the amusements of others, and especially those of her friends at Fleetwood ; who considered no party complete without the graceful figure of Mary, to glide from one to another of their guests, with the ready smile upon her countenance, and the pleasant common-place of easy conversation for ever flowing from her lips. In fact, when in good spirits, Mary was exactly what the world seems to have agreed to call a delightful woman—always gentle, affable, and easy, with a peculiar tendency to call forth the attentions of the communicative, the social, or the polite.

Little gifted as he was himself, in any of the gentle or gentlemanly arts which adorn a drawing-room, Fleetwood was perhaps the better prepared to value such an addition to his evening parties, as the conversation, address, and appearance of Mary supplied ; and with all her other advantages, there was a repose about her character, which

his own experience of social and domestic life had taught him to estimate, perhaps more highly than any other female charm. Thus the pretty nothings which Mary uttered with a sweet voice, and a gentle smile, often fell like music on his ear, while his eye was wont to follow her from place to place, if not exactly with admiration, yet with a sort of instinctive feeling, that in gazing on such an object, there was nothing to ruffle or distract.

"You will join our party on Thursday, Mary?" said he one day, as they walked together.

"On Thursday?" asked Mary; "what is to be done then?"

"We are going to have a pic-nic in the glen;" replied Fleetwood. "Has not Martha told you all about it?"

"Not a word," replied Mary, with some chagrin.

"I dare say she has been too busy," observed Fleetwood; "but never mind that. Remember you are invited by me, and I am sure Martha will mention it the first time the idea crosses her mind."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Mary, with an expressive look.

"Unquestionably, I am," replied her companion; "for she knows as well as I do, that no party of pleasure would be complete without you."

Mary shook her head incredulously; but smiled as she replied, "I have lately fancied Martha's pleasure was not so much enhanced by my presence as it used to be."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Fleetwood; "she is only falling back into her old habits. I am sure this last week has been one of torment to us both, nor do I believe there has been any single thing in which I have given her a moment's satisfaction."

It was but too true, as Fleetwood had said, that

Martha was now in all things herself again ; not altogether without her provocations, and in some respects more sinned against than sinning ; yet if the sins of an ungoverned temper were to be computed by the many words of bitterness and provocation which passed her lips, that was a fearful catalogue for which she would have to render an account.

Even on the morning of that day which had been chosen for their party of pleasure, to have judged by her ruffled brow and angry words, one would have thought that anything but pleasure had been the object for which she was preparing. Nor in this was Martha so singular a being as a superficial observer would have supposed, for how often is it the case, that trouble and turmoil, discord and dissatisfaction—nay, sometimes absolute pain, constitute a large proportion of the ingredients we make use of in preparing for absolute enjoyment.

On the morning of that day then, Martha, on whom rested all the responsibility of catering for the wants and wishes of the company, had fretted herself into a perfect fury, because many of her arrangements had not turned out exactly as she wished ; and without recollecting, that the happiness of the day depended more upon the sweetness of her temper, than upon any other kind of sweets, she set out with her many friends, as little like one who was bent upon enjoyment herself, as one who was intending that others should find enjoyment. Yet many days before this, and half the previous night, had been spent in planning, consulting, and contriving how everything should be made, or managed in the best possible manner, how every taste should be considered, every want supplied, and every wish indulged—Alas for kindness, that it is not always kind !

The morning of that day of pleasure dawned with more than usual splendour, and as the different guests arrived at an early hour, in order to set out in company together, it was a lively and animating sight to see them reining in their impatient steeds, or sauntering to and fro upon the lawn, until Martha had arranged the placing of the last hamper of provisions in that compendious vehicle, which conveyed the whole preparation for the woodland feast. And now, when at last fairly seated in a well-filled carriage, Martha looked around her with a good-humoured smile, and even laughed at some of the disasters which had attended her labours of love; for, to do her justice, the mistress of Fleetwood had nothing sullen or deliberately spiteful in her nature, and when once the storm of her anger was over, or the bustle of her business had ceased, she was one of the most easy, cheerful, and vivacious of companions. With her, both ill-humour, and its opposite, were but the impulse of the moment, each alternating with the other according to the circumstances of the time being.

But if any one looked really happy that day, it was Fleetwood, mounted on a beautiful charger, and consequently quite at liberty to ride off at any moment beyond the reach of correction or reproof, should it happen to be extended to him at an unwelcome time, or offered in an unpalatable form. Amongst other recommendations to a country gentleman, Fleetwood was perfect master of the equestrian art; and if there was any act of his life in which he could be charged with vanity, it was in the display of this art to the best advantage. Martha too was perfectly sensible of this excellence in her husband, however blind she might sometimes appear to his other virtues; and as she watched his handsome figure advancing

or retreating in the cavalcade, she could not refrain from a proud glance towards her friend, which seemed to say, "Would you not willingly exchange the scholarship of Melville for that?"

Mary, on this occasion, like a true lady of sentiment, had chosen to be more than usually pensive and silent, in proportion as mirth and cordiality prevailed on every hand. Perhaps she wanted stimulus, for it was early in the day, and it seems to be the penalty of those who keep up their spirits by artificial means, that their mornings shall invariably be seasons of stupor, or of melancholy. Seldom indeed, is it their happiness to command that even flow of cheerfulness which constitutes so large a portion of the enjoyment of social and domestic life.

Arrived at the place of their destination, the whole party hastened eagerly down into the little woody glen where they had agreed to dine; and while Martha fixed upon a suitable situation for this important part of the day's enjoyment, the rest of the company formed themselves into different groups, some to trace the windings of the woodland stream, which in some places pent up between almost overhanging rocks, burst forth in others, and diffusing itself over a wider surface, crept leisurely on between banks of the smoothest green. Various as their different tastes and objects of pursuit, were the paths selected by each merry group; some looking out for the best situation for a sketch, while others looked with greater eagerness for sheltered spots where trout might lie; and others still went rambling on with no decided aim, but to get rid as much as might be of the intervening space betwixt that, and the dinner hour.

And long before Martha and her servants had finished the arrangements, some of the strollers had come back,

to look askance with curious eyes at the interesting spot on which the different viands, packed and unpacked, were displayed ; while others, more venturesome, and amongst these was Mary, offered their services to assist in the arduous task which, until now, had devolved upon Martha alone.

“ I am so dreadfully faint,” said Mary, “ I would do anything to facilitate the preparation of dinner.”

“ Perhaps you would like a glass of wine ?” observed Martha, “ before the company sit down.”

“ Indeed I should ;” replied Mary, “ for this is just the time when I usually take luncheon, and I feel as if I should actually die of want.”

In another instant Martha had offered the cordial of which her friend appeared to be so much in need, and from that hour Mary’s spirits revived amazingly.

The whole company now began to collect so seriously around the scene of Martha’s display, that while she declared her preparations were not half completed, the popular voice was so much in favour of sitting down to the dinner as it was, that resistance was in vain ; and Martha, for once in her life laughing heartily at her own defeat, sat down with the rest, and helped unsparingly out of the abundance she had brought—and abundance indeed it was, for with the same lavish expenditure which characterized her expressions of feeling, whatever might be uppermost in her mind, Martha was accustomed to provide for the entertainment of her friends ; and never did she preside with more satisfaction at her own table at the hall, than over this rural repast.

Those are not the proudest moments of human life, which convince us how large a portion of our vivacity and good humour arises out of the prospect or the reality

of eating and drinking to our satisfaction. On the present occasion, however, the company were not fastidious as to the moral of the scene, and being all of one mind, they partook heartily and plentifully of the good cheer, without shame or compunction about what place the gratification it afforded maintained in their esteem. And now the first dishes being pretty well cleared, a splendid dessert was displayed, with every variety of rich wines, and other kinds of beverage suited to the occasion, such as cordials for those who were in danger of catching cold, and lighter draughts for such as were heated or fatigued by the exercise of rambling through the glen. As a natural accompaniment, songs were then called for, and many who would scarcely have trusted their vocal powers, and were still less likely to have been called upon for the exercise of their "sweet voices" in a drawing-room, inspired by the natural and wild beauties of the scene, as well as refreshed by the repast, poured forth a questionable sort of melody, which, however, there was no one so ill-natured as to criticize or condemn.

Happiest of the happy that day was Robert Fleetwood; for whatever his wife might be alone, and comparatively unoccupied, she was, of all the women he had ever beheld, the most in accordance with his taste for an occasion like this; while his own talents, and peculiar turn of mind, were exactly such as to render him the life of such a scene, passing from one to another of the company with a willing service, or a ready repartee, the more genuine and prompt, that there was no restraint from those forms and regulations of society which almost necessarily prevail where persons congregate together after the usual fashion of mixing in company, or entertaining guests.

Yet, happy, and free, and lighthearted as Fleetwood felt himself, he was not alone in his enjoyment, nor singular in its excess, for all agreed it was a day to be remembered for the rest of their lives; and some gathered flowers to press, and keep as memorials of the place and time; while others wrote verses in their common-place books; and others, still, made little paltry sketches, which their friends persisted in declaring to be wonderfully like; but in which, had the surrounding woods and waterfalls on that occasion been allowed to judge, they would scarcely have recognized themselves; any more than the birds which sung aloft in the waving branches, would have supposed the music of their strains to have been rivalled by the sounds which issued from the merry group below.

But what cared any one of the numerous party met that day, for the credit of song or sketch-book? All had come together for the purpose of being happy, and all agreed that their utmost hopes had been attained. There was not a dissentient voice; and the rare but distinguished honour of having made a party of pleasure *go off well*, was awarded to Martha, and her rightful lord.

The day, however, was not done yet; and before the declining sun should sink beyond the western heights, it was proposed that a general ramble should take place, in order to explore the remoter beauties of the glen. On this proposal being made, a general acclamation echoed from rock to rock, and in another moment the stream was crossed by the most adventurous, while delicate ladies picked their way from stone to stone, occasionally calling in the aid of firmer hands to support them in the perilous ascent, or to disentangle their light dresses from the

shrubs and briars which grew in wild profusion on every hand.

"You must not wait for me," said Martha, as some of the company politely lingered behind the rest, "I shall stay here, to see that everything is properly replaced."

"The servants," replied Fleetwood, "can do that."

"Servants, indeed!" exclaimed Martha; "and how many plates do you think would come out whole, if the servants packed them up?"

These observations being rather sharply uttered, and accompanied by a frown which always portended danger, Fleetwood deemed it unwise to press the subject farther; but turning to Mary, who appeared from the absence of her husband to be peculiarly companionless, he took her hand, and led her gaily and rapidly along the course of the stream, not unfrequently rendering her footing less sure, by jumping upon the same stone to which he had directed her, and consequently being reduced to the necessity of supporting her in his arms until both were able to leave it together. Whether it was owing to the exhilaration of the scene, or to the unmeasured freedom with which he had partaken of the good cheer, Fleetwood had seldom been seen in wilder spirits, or more boisterous good humour, than on that occasion; and it just so happening, that Mary fell in his way, and that his previous acquaintance with her had placed them on a familiar and easy footing with each other, she became for the moment a sort of plaything in his hands, upon whom he exercised his natural and unbounded love of fun and frolic. Thus at one time she was borne in his arms, blushing and vexed to be so disrespectfully treated,

before the whole company ; while at another she was made to scramble up an almost perpendicular bank or cliff, from whence short stems of knotted trees threw out their branches, and overhung the stream. In vain did Mary remonstrate—in vain did she resist. The form of her companion was almost gigantic when compared with hers, and his herculean hold was such as no woman could withstand. But the secret of all was, and here she reaped the just reward of former folly, that in past moments of excitement, when the guard of discretion had been taken from her words and looks, she had allowed a license of behaviour, which it was impossible for her now to restrain ; and thus, as a married woman, she was a laughing-stock to some of the party, and a wonder to all.

“Fleetwood,” said Mary, at last, with more of anger in her looks than she had ever exhibited before, “I will not go one step farther with you—indeed I will not.”

As these words passed her lips, she planted her foot upon a mass of stone which jutted out from the rest, and clinging with both hands to the branch of a tree, still continued to protest against moving one step farther.

“But suppose I make you,” said Fleetwood, laughing heartily ; and, placing his own foot also upon the stone, he stooped to take her again in his arms, when suddenly a crash was heard, a cloud of mingling dust and spray was seen, and both figures had disappeared from the spot.

The eyes of many of the company had been upon Fleetwood and Mary as they stood there, and now a rush was made to that part of the stream into which they must have fallen. Mary was the first object of their care, and she was soon drawn out from the heap of stones and earth which had followed their descent, to all appearance little

injured by her fall. She even smiled herself to think of her disaster ; and still conscious of having occupied a place in public observation not very creditable to a married woman, she endeavoured to make as little as she could of the event altogether.

While Mary busied herself in endeavouring to arrange her disordered garments, some of which had scarcely touched the water, the attention of the company, whose fears were now in a great measure relieved, suddenly turned from her to her companion, and seeing him still laid without making any effort to rise, a fearful panic seized them all. It was but the effort of a moment, to ascertain the fact ; but that moment to Mary was an age of agony too intense to be described.

“Tell me,” said she, grasping with a frenzied hold the dress of the person who stood next her—“Tell me, for I dare not look !”

“It is all over,” said the man who had drawn him from the side of the water, and in the same moment there burst from the lips of Mary, a shriek so wild and loud, that it was heard in the most distant parts of the glen, and immediately the various groups who had strayed in different directions came hastening to the spot.

“He is not gone yet,” whispered an eager voice.

“Not yet,” responded others ; and now every means and suggestion which the situation afforded were tried in rapid succession, while no one but Mary seemed to have thought of his poor wife.

“What is the matter ?” said Martha, who had now arrived ; and at the sound of her voice a stillness so awful in its solemnity fell upon the group, that each could hear the beating of their own hearts, and no one had now to ask whether death had actually been there, for all could

distinguish the laborious breathing of him who was yet perfectly unconscious of his actual state.

With a calmness so unnatural to her, that every one feared it might betoken the utter derangement of her mind, Martha kneeled down beside her husband, and, bending over him, applied herself to discover whether there was any wound or hurt upon his head, which might require attention. With her own hand she raised the hair from his temples, and beckoning for water to be brought, washed off some little spots of blood where the skin had been slightly grazed. She then with lips as pale as ashes, yet with a voice so firm and deep that others started to hear it, gave orders to her servants to draw the carriage as near as possible to the descent into the glen; and while one was despatched upon the fleetest horse to fetch the nearest surgeon, she prepared to await his coming, by seating herself upon the ground, and raising the head of her husband so that it might rest upon her lap.

It was not long before a doctor appeared, but he brought with him little consolation. Bleeding and the usual means of restoration were resorted to, and it might just be said that life was not extinct, but that was all. Nothing was to be hoped but from the strictest silence and repose, and thus the difficulty of returning home seemed to be magnified a thousand fold. Yet even this must be attempted, for Martha thought if death was inevitably so near, it would be better that it should take place beneath her own roof; and therefore she prepared with firmness and decision to assist in the fearful task of removal from that now melancholy scene.

In this distressing duty every one seemed to feel the propriety of leaving her to think and almost to act for

herself. Her own servants were the ready recipients of her orders, and with the assistance of the doctor, the apparently lifeless body was borne to the carriage, and placed carefully in the most favourable position for being conveyed to his own home. In this carriage there was room for two others besides Martha. The doctor very properly took the next place to the afflicted wife, and beckoning to Mary to join them as her most intimate and familiar friend, the servants were ordered to drive at a slow and regular pace.

Agonizing as were the feelings of the wife on this occasion, there are few persons, who, if they could have seen and known all, would not have exchanged those of Mary for hers. To be looked upon as blamable beyond what we really are, is at all times hard to bear; but to feel that we have been too much in fault to be able to assert any claim to exculpation, is calculated to add indescribable bitterness to the conviction that we are suffering more than we deserve. Gladly—how gladly! would Mary have fallen upon the neck of her friend, or even at her feet, and implored alike her pardon and her pity. Gladly would she have devoted herself now to the most arduous duty which might in any way assist or comfort that friend. To this, however, she was sufficiently convinced that she must not now aspire; for once, when she had stretched out her hand to adjust the cushion upon which the head of the poor sufferer was laid, that hand had been thrust back by Martha, with a movement so expressive of repulsion and abhorrence, that to have attempted such an act of unwelcome interference again, would have been as indelicate as useless.

Mary had consequently no alternative left, but to fall back upon her own reflections, and be still. The journey



A Party of Pleasure.

Fisher, Son & Co. London & Paris.

seemed long to every one except the unconscious object of all their solicitude, yet perhaps it was longest to Mary, shut out as she was from the sacred privilege either of assisting her friend, or sympathizing in her distress.

Arrived at the gate leading up to her own house, Martha could not help looking thankfully towards the spot, as with clasped hands she breathed a fervent prayer that the last spark of life might not be extinguished by the effort which had now to be made. But though she gave her orders distinctly, and collectedly, to the different domestics who thronged around the carriage, no single word was uttered by which it could be supposed that Mary was included in these arrangements. So far from this, it was but too evident that her assistance was neither calculated upon, nor wished for; and therefore as soon as she had ascertained that the great object of removing the invalid to his own apartment had been accomplished without apparent injury, Mary turned silently away from the house, to trace her solitary way to that home, which, however unattractive it might have been at other times, seemed almost welcome now, as the only place where she could hide her humiliation and her self-reproach. Had present circumstances all been favourable to her complacency, it is more than probable that Mary would not have suffered as she did, that she would have persuaded herself, as she had often done before, that little blame of any kind could attach to her, and that, situated as she had been, it would have been impossible for her to act differently from what she did. But there was something in her present position so painfully humiliating—something so desolate too, in being overlooked, and forgotten, when her own danger had been extreme, and in being allowed to walk home alone without one inquiry as to her

health and comfort, that Mary literally felt that night, as she pursued her melancholy way, almost as abject and forlorn as the beggars who asked charity of her as she passed by ; and she even gave a shilling to one poor woman from a sort of fellow-feeling, which brought the tears into her eyes—tears which she could not shed for her own complicated sufferings, but which the simple story of a stranger's sorrow suddenly called forth.

The shadows of evening had already fallen thickly over the landscape, before Mary turned away from the habitation of her friends ; and long before she reached her own door, dark night had fallen over the scene. Upon a public road through a populous country, there was, however, nothing to fear ; and if there had, Mary would have been too much absorbed by her own thoughts and feelings, to be easily alarmed. Still, it is often in such moods, that imagination calls up images the most opposite that can be conceived to the train of thought with which the mind is engaged ; just as dreams are popularly said to be the reverse of the truth, from the extremes into which they deviate from reality.

Whether it was in this manner or not, Mary was at a loss to decide, but once or twice during her solitary walk, her mind was suddenly impressed with the idea that some one was following in her footsteps not very far behind ; and looking back on the instant, she thought each time that the figure of a man stopped as suddenly, and disappeared behind the hedge.

It was impossible that a lonely woman, however deeply engaged in her own meditations, should be the subject of such impressions, without an accompanying dread ; and a cold shiver crept over the solitary traveller, as she pursued her way, her feelings alternating between the

horrors she had left behind, and those which seemed to be more immediate, though less certain in their form and character.

“It is all fancy,” said Mary to herself, as she drew near to a row of cottages, where the evening fire was burning brightly, and the shutters still unclosed allowed a sort of protecting light to fall across the pathway. “It is all fancy; just the consequence of being overwrought by this day of excitement and distress. I will think no more of it;” and with this mental conclusion she passed on, away from those cheerful cottages, and out upon a wide bleak hill beyond which she could just distinguish, in the valley beyond, the lights which glimmered in the many windows of her native town.

While near those cottages, and within hearing of the steps which passed in and out, and the cheerful voices distinguishable when a door happened to be open, it was easy for Mary to reason upon the probabilities of her mind being acted upon by some illusion, arising out of the excited state of her feelings; but no sooner had she found herself again alone, screened by a high ridge of ground from all sight of those cheerful dwellings, and beyond the sound of every human voice, than a feeling of indefinite apprehension again crept over her; and had not the dread of remaining one moment longer than was necessary upon that barren heath, urged on her trembling steps to almost more than their natural speed, she would have sunk under the conviction that it was impossible for her to reach her own door.

Across this heath, however, she passed, without any farther alarm, and as there was now but a short lane diverging from the public road through which she had to pass, she darted along it with the speed of lightning.

and having reached her own house, knocked at the door with a violence which seemed at the moment to impart a vague sense of safety, from the very loudness and determination of the sound. Before the door was opened, Mary had time to retreat a few steps, in order to look up at the study-window, and she now discovered to her surprise that no light was there ; but before she had time to draw any conclusions from this unwonted circumstance, her arms were grasped from behind, as if by the hold of a giant, while a strange voice, to her, half whispered and half shrieked a kind of gibberish in her ear, which at once convinced her that her steps had really been followed, not by a spectre of her own creating, but by some poor idiot, or more probably some maniac escaped from the care of his keepers ; and though but little satisfaction was to be reaped from this conclusion, yet as the figure had again vanished, and as the door of her own home was now opened, Mary felt that she could scarcely be grateful enough, for not having been clenched in that iron grasp on a part of her journey where no help could have been obtained.

“ Where is your master ? ” said she to the servant, as, breathless and exhausted, she sunk down in a chair.

“ Upstairs in the study,” was the usual reply ; but the servant, more than usually talkative, went on to tell her mistress that a most unusual circumstance had taken place that day—that her master had actually walked out ; and she then proceeded to expatiate upon the benefits to be hoped from this change in his habits and way of life.

“ Perhaps he went out to spend the evening with my father,” said Mary.

“ Oh, dear, no,” replied the maid ; “ he came back again in a quarter of an hour, and I have not heard him

since—not even walking backwards and forwards, as he always does ; but most likely the change of going out has done instead of that.”

“ I don’t think there is any light in the study to-night,” observed Mary.

“ Ah, then,” replied the maid, “ I dare say master has fallen asleep. You know being out in the air does make people sleepy sometimes.”

“ Scarcely being out so short a time as a quarter of an hour,” said Mary ; and with this observation, she rose up to go into the study, and see for herself what could be the cause of the silence and the darkness there.

“ Melville !” said Mary, calling her husband’s name as she entered, in order to prevent the necessity of her going farther, and stumbling over books and papers,—“ Melville, where are you ?” she repeated, now beginning to imagine it might be as her maid had suggested, that he had actually fallen asleep, a circumstance at which she could not have been surprised, considering his usual want of rest, during those hours which are naturally appropriated to sleep.

“ Melville !” cried Mary again, this time louder than before ; and now compelled to advance farther into the room, where a more than usual degree of disorder characterized the whole scene of the student’s labours ; nor was it until exploring the extremity of the apartment, and after that a kind of inner recess used by her husband as a dressing-room, that Mary became convinced he was not, either sleeping or waking, present there.

A feeling of consternation very naturally followed this conviction ; but how was it increased, when, like a flash of lightning, another idea in connection with it passed

across her mind—That voice—that maniac's voice—had she not heard it before? Once, and once only—It must be the same! What a thought of horror was that!

"Go instantly for my father," said Mary to her servant, with lips so quivering and pale, that the woman could not leave the house without asking if anything was the matter with her master.

"Not that I know of," replied Mary; "but you must make haste—fly—and tell my father to come to me instantly."

Without reflecting upon the effect such a message was calculated to produce upon an aged and now infirm man like Mr. Churchill, Mary threw herself upon the sofa, and literally beat her head with her clenched hand, so intolerable was the agony of mind she at that moment endured. In a few minutes she again started up, and with an effort perfectly natural to a person of her habits, was about to take something to support her through this hour of trial, and of frightful apprehension. Already the cordial was poured out—a cordial which few persons would have denied her the use of at such a time. The glass was even raised to her lips, when suddenly she replaced it on the table, and with clasped hands and eyes directed upwards, exclaimed, "Enough, and too much, of this. The immortal mind which I have so guiltily neglected, stifling its energies, and drowning its highest powers—oh, had I kept and used this mind as I ought, it might have saved my husband from a mad-house, and me from poverty and ruin!"

To Mary it seemed an age before her father came, and, startled as she was by every passing sound, by the wind against the shutters, and by the perpetual dread that her husband was at the door, while she alone would

have to let him in ; she yet had time to look at her actual situation, and to see how different it might have been. But two months, her husband had told her, would be required for the completion of his work. Two months then would have placed them both in easy, if not in affluent, circumstances. In two months he would have been enabled to rest for the remainder of his life, and now !—

It was impossible for Mary now to shut her eyes upon the fact, that her husband had long been labouring under a degree of partial alienation of mind. She could see it now on looking back, in a thousand instances, which at the time she had attributed to mere strangeness, and singularity of character ! and her astonishment was unbounded, to think that she had not suspected his real situation before. She was struck too, more forcibly than ever, with her own unfeeling conduct towards him, in the life of unmitigated labour he had led, while hers had been one of worse than idleness ; waste—absolute waste of that precious gift of intellect, which in his case, had been taxed too heavily for its powers. How often, too, from very weariness of her inactive life, and love of mere excitement for the moment, had Mary drowned her thoughts in a temporary dream ; and lost in mere animal repose, those convictions which were calculated, and no doubt designed, to rouse her into healthy and profitable action. What a life then was hers, upon which to look back in such a moment ; unstained, it is true, with any positive crime, yet all-unfruitful in its usefulness to man, and all-ungrateful in its character to God.

The long-expected sound of her father's voice and footsteps, came at last, and Mary met him at the door to beg, though too late, that he would not be alarmed. It

was evident that the whole frame of the old man had received a shock he was ill calculated to bear ; and when Mary had told her sad story, and he prepared himself to go out in the dark, and alone, to seek her husband, she saw, by the trembling of his hands and the shaking of his knees, how unfit he was for such a task.

Convinced of this, Mary consulted with her father about admitting a third party to their confidence, and an able active man was soon thought of, who accompanied Mr. Churchill in his melancholy search.

Again left to her own reflections, and glad to seize hold of anything to relieve her anguish and remorse, Mary took up a candle and went again into the study, in order to ascertain, if possible, the actual state of her husband's literary labours. Indeed she was secretly sustained by a vague hope that it might have been the very completion of his task, which, by placing him in so novel and long-wished-for a situation, had been too much for the equanimity of his mind ; and as she knew as little as her own servant, what had been his mode of proceeding, and what indeed was the exact nature of his work in all its different parts, she stepped carefully, and looked about amongst his papers, fondly persuading herself that she should find some collected mass of manuscript, which, even if placed in other hands, might be available for the completing the object so long and so devotedly cherished.

No such object, however, met the view of the curious observer, but on the other hand, a most appalling spectacle of fragments of torn and scribbled paper, some blotted and covered over with a character so wild and irregular, that it was evident the hand of a maniac had been there ; while others had every appearance of having

been rent in pieces, and tossed into the air, as if in some fit of frenzy, or of folly.

It was indeed a melancholy picture which that close dark room presented—a picture of the wreck of human intellect, of its mighty labour and its no less mighty ruin—of the pride and the glory of a godlike nature, and of its pitiable and humiliating fall—of the majesty of man in his wisdom and his power, and of his feebleness and folly when his slender thread of mind is broken.

If from the first moment in which the idea flashed across the mind of Mary, that it was the voice of her husband she had heard muttering such disjointed and incoherent language in her ear, she had never doubted his identity with that mysterious figure, and that consequently with him every ray of reason was extinct; to her father the proofs of his aberration of mind appeared to be still more convincing, for he in fact had entertained some secret doubts of his entire sanity for some time past; though as the subject had never been alluded to by his daughter, he had deemed it would be worse than useless to alarm her with unnecessary suspicions of what, after all, might have no existence but in his own apprehensions.

The case, however, needed little explanation to him, for no sooner had Mary told the history of her fears, than the whole truth flashed upon him; and without uttering any exclamation of surprise, he had prepared to leave the house in the manner already described.

Before Mr. Churchill and his companion set out on their melancholy search, the moon had risen, and shone with a light so clear, as to render it easy to recognize any one they might meet or pass on their way; and with cautious steps, and eyes which wandered to every shadow, and every hiding-place along the road, they reached at

last the brow of the bleak hill which Mary had passed in such speed and terror on her return home. For the first time, they spoke to each other here, and, pausing for a while, looked round and listened, but neither saw nor heard anything calculated to guide their investigation.

It was not many yards from this spot, as they again turned to pursue their search, that an object presented itself, which made a sudden shiver creep through the frame of the old man ; for there, crouching down upon a low seat by the wayside, was the unconscious object of their solicitude, to all appearance as quiet and harmless as a lamb.

At the first sound of the old man's voice, Melville looked up, and being kindly requested to accompany him home, he rose from his seat, and walked along with Mr. Churchill and his companion, as if nothing strange had happened to him ; and indeed his mild and passive manner of yielding to their request, almost shook for the moment their belief that all was not right with him.

On approaching his own house, however, the poor maniac—for such indeed he was—betrayed symptoms too evident to admit of a doubt, that reason had lost all mastery over his actions, or his mind. Even the familiar sound of the knocker at his own door, threw him into such a frenzy of excitement, that had not the person engaged to accompany Mr. Churchill been a man of herculean strength, he would scarcely have been able to retain his hold of the wild and frantic being committed to his charge.

On entering the house, too, it appeared evident, that the scene of his late laborious occupations was the last place to which he ought to have been conducted ; for, on trying the experiment of placing him again amongst his

books and papers, the violence of his disorder became so much increased, that all were glad to retreat from that now melancholy place.

How to pass the advancing night in any tolerable degree of safety, was with Mary the most important consideration ; for she saw plainly, and her father saw it too, that the morrow must find her husband provided with a very different home from that to which he had been accustomed, but which could now no longer be a home to him.

On the morrow, then, this necessary but most painful removal was made. The poor maniac was committed to the care of strangers, in a well-ordered establishment for the reception of the insane ; while Mary, with all the vivid convictions and startled fears of one who is suddenly awakened from a long sleep, applied herself to the task of endeavouring once more to ascertain, whether the great labour of her husband's life had been defeated by the unconscious extravagance of the last few days.

CHAP. VIII.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

IN the mean time, the situation of Martha was scarcely less distressing than that of her early friend. Penetrated to the heart by the same kind of conviction, that as a wife she had not been all she ought, Martha sat and watched by the bedside of her husband, wrapped in a state of speechless anxiety, which admitted of no relief. In vain she had appealed to the doctor, again and again, for any ray of hope, however small. He could only repeat that the utmost caution was necessary, and the most profound stillness, lest any kind of excitement should disturb the brain, upon which the injury had been inflicted; and though Martha would perhaps have chosen any mode of treatment, as it affected herself, rather than that which proscribed all effort; she felt too deeply the responsibility of her situation, and how much she had at stake, to venture upon the slightest deviation from the rule laid down, not only for her own direction, but for that of her whole household.

At last, however, some faintly favourable symptoms appeared; and, oh! what a brightening of existence was that to her, who had prayed only for a day, or hour, of reason, and of recognition, in which to pour forth her full heart—in which to ask, and to obtain, forgiveness for the past!

"But you think, now, he will live?" said she to the cautious doctor, on the third day after Fleetwood's accident.

"Perhaps he may live," replied the doctor, "but"—

"But what?" exclaimed Martha, with such vehemence as not to allow the doctor time to reply. "You do not mean to say he will never have his senses? You shall not say that; for I cannot—I will not, bear it."

"I will not disoblige you so far as to say that," replied the doctor—and he commenced an elaborate description of the nature of the injury, when Martha interrupted him again;

"Tell me," said she, "just one thing—will my husband ever understand what I say to him again?"

"That," resumed the doctor, "will depend in great measure upon your own judicious treatment."

But Martha interrupted the doctor again, and laying her hand upon his arm, "Sir," said she, "I will do everything you tell me, to the minutest trifle—what can I promise you more?"

"It is not the exact letter of my directions to which I allude," said the doctor, "but to the spirit of them."

"What can you mean?" asked Martha.

"I mean," replied the doctor, "that quiet—absolute quiet—with the absence of all excitement, is the only chance we have of the restoration of the patient, even to a common degree of understanding. There must be no agitation even in your manner—not a breath, nor a tone, that might ruffle him."

"But how am I to live?" asked Martha, in her accustomed hasty manner.

"My good lady," said the doctor, kindly taking both her hands, "you must live a new life. You must live for

your husband, in order that he may be able to learn how to live for his God."

The old doctor, who had never spoken to Martha—perhaps not to any one—in this strain before, now hurried out of the house, as if he had been guilty of a breach of etiquette, in thus venturing out of his appropriate sphere; but, long after he was gone, Martha remained in the same attitude in which he had left her, musing upon those strange and solemn words, which, in all probability, would not have struck her so forcibly, had they come from an expected quarter.

The illness of Fleetwood was not exactly of the kind which his wife had anticipated; for though his improvement was by degrees almost imperceptible to those who watched him most closely, it afforded a faint ray of hope, that he might again be restored to the entire possession of his reason. But with this faint promise of brighter days in future, came so fearful an access of susceptibility of feeling, as to render it almost impossible for him to escape both excitement and irritation. Had the case been quite hopeless, it is probable that Martha would have felt less devolving upon her, and she might from this reason have become less careful of her own conduct—but that ray of precious hope, how often did it shoot across her aching heart with a sudden light, rendered yet more brilliant by the darkness of the surrounding gloom. Through how many hours of tedious watching, did this ray of hope sustain her soul! through how many trials of patience and forbearance! until forbearance at last began to grow into a habit, and impatience gradually subsided into quiet submission.

Of all situations which Martha could have been placed in, this was one of the last she would have chosen; yet

such was its beneficial effects upon her character, that she seemed actually transformed, as regarded temper and feeling, into a new creature. It is true there were times, when, quitting for a few moments the side of her husband, Martha began to enter into all her old habits of household disturbance ; but, happily for her, and all within the sphere of her influence, she only *began* the old system again ; for each time that her attention was roused by some act of neglect or disobedience on the part of her servants, she was reminded of the necessity of quiet throughout her household ; and grief at having herself transgressed this rule, sent her back to her husband, to soothe him by the gentlest and kindest attentions.

It was a natural and sufficient cause for regret with Martha that she could not, thus circumstanced, enjoy much of the society of her child. For any other society she had almost ceased to care, for now that Mary held no place in her affections, she seemed not to be solicitous about renewing any of those intimacies in which Mary had held a part. It was a wonder to many why Mary was never seen in the house assisting her friend, as it was natural to suppose she would, in her difficult and arduous duties ; but the visits of the different callers at Fleetwood were now so short, that none of them went so far as to ask directly what might be the cause. Some indeed shook their heads knowingly, as if they could tell the cause, and others suggested what they knew was not the fact, in the hope of soliciting what was. But for all this, nobody knew ; not even Mary herself, at least she said so to her own heart, though her heart spoke in return with a voice of its own, and told her that she knew too well.

Mary, like other friends, had sent regularly to Fleetwood to inquire after the health of the patient; and regularly she had received in return, those cold and common-place answers, which were dealt out to the most indifferent inquirers; yet while the impulse of her feelings often prompted her to go over to Fleetwood herself, and ask either for a renewal of her friendship there, or for an entire and candid explanation of her actual offence; as often as this thought arose in her mind, it was checked by that secret voice, which told her again that she knew too well why her presence should not be acceptable there.

And thus the distance between the two friends grew, as it always does, where there is nothing definite to explain, yet something on both sides to be felt; and as Mary had the most time for brooding upon sad thoughts in general, she was consequently the greatest sufferer from this breach of a close and long-continued intimacy.

Nor was Mary's situation in other respects an enviable one. Deprived of all hope of increasing her pecuniary resources, and compelled to give up the home in which she had known but little enjoyment, it had appeared to her at first as the best and happiest arrangement, to shelter herself and her griefs beneath her parents' roof. The reunion of families which have been separated, is not however always a safe experiment, and Mary soon made the discovery, that the most indulgent of mothers can, on certain occasions, prefer their own gratification to that of their daughters. Had Mary known from what root excessive indulgence springs, she would have been prepared for this, or for any other manifestation of selfishness; but from not looking at the subject in this point of view, she became liable to feelings of the most

humiliating and painful nature, amounting to little less than a conviction that she was no longer a welcome addition to her father's household.

It is the peculiar characteristic of the morbidly sensitive, that they are never satisfied with a moderate degree of discomfort, but out of the most familiar mal-occurrences to which human nature is liable, will perpetually make to themselves miseries of an extreme, or extraordinary nature. It is true that the misery of being unwelcome at the board at which we sit, and the fireside whose warmth we share, can scarcely be classed amongst the minor miseries of life; but the case should be a very clear one as regards our own family, before we lay it really to heart; and Mary was perhaps a little too much disposed to construe her mother's simple love of self into a pointed neglect of her daughter's comfort.

Mrs. Churchill had been one of those fond mothers, who purchase the affection of childhood by unlimited indulgence, and who studiously provide for their offspring a never-ending series of gratifications, not so much for the sake of giving pleasure, as with a view to being themselves the gainers in the end. Having always enjoyed, until the time of her husband's late losses, sufficient means for these indulgences, the trying test had never been applied to her affection, whether she would be equally indulgent if every addition made to the pleasures of her daughter, were just so much extracted from her own. But now at last, this closest of all trials had come—a trial under which other kinds of love besides that of Mrs. Churchill have been known to fail.

Not such, however, was the heart of the father. Feeble, emaciated, and rapidly sinking as he was, it seemed as if to him his own sorrows, and his own priva-

tions were all lost sight of when contemplating the situation of his child. That golden prospect to which he had looked with scarcely less of hope, than the ardent and indefatigable student himself, had left him, when it failed, an humbled, broken-spirited, and disappointed man. Yet with all these feelings bearing down his heart, and adding their burden to the weight of years, the tenderness he had ever felt as a father for his only child, grew more intense; and as every other pleasure in the world gave way, he seemed to cling to the sympathy and companionship of Mary, with a fondness which but too closely resembled the doating of a second childhood.

It was natural that this fondness on the part of her parent, should render it difficult for Mary to tear herself away. And indeed where could she go? Oftener than the day this frightful question presented itself to her secret thoughts, accompanied with others no less difficult to answer; such as how ought she to act—what could she do—and what was likely to become of her? But while labouring under this miserable uncertainty of mind, while tossed about from one impracticable scheme to another, and while at times on the very point of sinking under the temptation which presented itself to apply again to that familiar and frequent medicine for bodily and mental depression, which had so often soothed her griefs, and dulled the edge of pain—under all these accumulated trials, Mary *did* refrain; and the consequence was, that she was thus enabled, after a long season of mental suffering and indecision, to see clearly what her position and her duties really were, and at last to form a resolution equal to meeting the difficulties of her case. Under such circumstances, it is no vain assumption to, say, that had her former habits not

received a sudden and decided check, Mary could neither have seen her situation as it really was, nor have acted upon her present convictions as to what was right; for every time the idea of remaining where she was had assumed a painful character, she would have lulled her feelings into temporary indifference by that partial remedy for present pain, which leaves a fearful reckoning for some future day.

Mary was seated at the casement of a long low room, which still retained the name of the nursery, when she first experienced that exalting consciousness which is derived from having really resolved upon doing what is strictly right. That she should have formed her determination there, seemed strange; for that room, of all others in her father's house, was endeared to her by the recollections of childhood; and to her no less than to others, did the days of childhood look happy—perhaps happier than they really were, when their many tears had become too distant and too dim to be discerned. Yet so it was, that towards the close of a still evening, Mary, who had been seated in that old room for hours, at last sprung from her seat in the low window, and, clasping her hands together, looked up as if to ask a blessing on the act for which her spirit was at last prepared. And then, when her lips had moved some time in prayer, she fell upon her knees, and wept as she had never done before; for thoughts came crowding to her heart so thick and fast, and recollections of old times were stirred, and all the past looked bright, and early youth seemed innocent and pure, thus viewed far off, and by comparison with riper years.

When her long and passionate weeping had spent itself at last, Mary rose from her posture of humiliation,

and, looking out at the old casement clothed with ivy, she saw that the moon was just rising above the horizon, and glancing her beams across the steeple of the grey church, which stood embowered amongst a group of massive and umbrageous elms. A more than usual calm was spread that evening over earth and heaven; for as the moon rose higher, and the branches of the tall ash which grew beside the window, spread their leaves distinct in separate shade, not one was seen to move; nor did that shivering thrill run through the poplar boughs, which often whispers of repose, when all things else are still.

Silent and melancholy was the gaze which Mary threw around upon this scene, so fraught with memories of the past—with hours—nay, years of wasted feeling, and of mispent time. And, oh! what a bitter thought it is, that we must begin, when it is too late, to use the energies, and husband the means, we neglected while they were capable of effecting any permanent or real good. Still there remains one consolation, even under such depressing circumstances, and that consists in having seen our error, in having been awakened to a higher sense of duty, and in having still retained the power and the determination to begin.

This then was Mary's consolation, and it enabled her to enjoy a night of sweet and sound repose, which her former resources under trial and affliction never could have procured. On the morrow she awoke, as one is apt to do under such circumstances, with a vague sense of some calamity impending—some indefinite notion of having formed a design which there was no necessity for carrying out, accompanied by an almost uncontrollable desire to shrink from a duty which now presented itself to

her mind as having been entirely self-imposed. Mary, however, had become an altered woman during the last few months of her existence ; and, rousing herself from the dreaminess and uncertainty of these waking thoughts, she looked out upon the beauty of a fresh clear morning, and having committed her way unto the guidance of Him upon whose help she had lately learned to depend, more than upon her own energy or strength, she was able to meet her father with a smiling countenance, and even to ask him with perfect self-possession if he would give her an hour of his company alone.

This hour was spent in a quiet stroll about the garden which joined upon the churchyard, to which both the father and the daughter, as if by a simultaneous impulse, directed their steps ; and here the old man, as was perfectly natural to one of his habits, fell so entirely into a train of thought familiar to that place and scene, that Mary had to begin her story again, by telling him in plain terms, it was her intention to leave him for an indefinite period ; though she carefully abstained from saying anything which could lead him to suppose that her real intention was to provide herself with another home.

With that apparent insensibility which seems as if mercifully designed to hang like a misty curtain over the susceptibilities of old age, Mr. Churchill appeared to be listening to the conversation of his daughter, as to some familiar sound, which scarcely possessed the power of interrupting the tenour of his own reflections ; and while, with one hand resting on her shoulder, he slowly tracked the narrow path, which passing feet had worn amongst the graves, he paused, ever and anon, to point with his stick to some inscription on the stones, or to tell of some neigh-

bour, coeval with himself, whose remains were occupying that last and peaceful home.

"Then, if you see no objection," said Mary, at last, "I think I shall leave you as soon as I can hear again from my friend in town."

"Leave me! Leave me?" said her father, with a startled look. "I shall not be long here, Mary; you might have staid until I was sleeping beneath this turf."

"Father," said Mary, "you do not understand me;" and she began her story again; though it was a cruel business to go through all its painful details, so as to make them intelligible to her father's understanding; for, clear as he was upon all points relating to the past, and distinctly as he retained his faculties with regard to some of the most important subjects which had occupied his attention, he had of late become peculiarly dense as to the reception of a new idea, connected with the practical affairs of daily life.

"Perhaps I shall be sleeping there when you come back again, Mary," he continued, pointing to the exact spot he had fixed upon, as the place of his own repose; "and take care, child, that the place, is kept free from these nettles, that I tell old Williams about so often. It is an unseemly sight, to see the graves of our relatives grown over with weeds. You will see to that, Mary—won't you, dear child?"

Mary answered as distinctly as she could, to this and every other charge of the same kind; for her father went on, with almost childish volubility, descanting upon various unimportant particulars connected with the close of his own life; and which, though simple in themselves, convey to the heart a peculiar kind of chill, when

we hear them spoken of by the very voice, whose familiar tones will have ceased for ever, before the time arrives for acting upon these last requests.

“Yes,” Mary continued to answer, as her father laid upon her charge after charge; but her head was often turned aside, and her handkerchief was often raised to her eyes, to wipe away the tears which fell amongst the long thick grass, where many an humble villager had wept before.

Still, amongst the painful sensations which Mary naturally experienced, on finding that the light of her father’s mind was so nearly extinguished, there was a melancholy satisfaction in the accompanying reflection, that he would thus be spared much of the pain which might otherwise have accompanied the idea of being deserted in old age by his only child; and thus her resolution gained additional strength from the conviction, that her parent would not in reality be a sufferer from the step she was about to take.

One duty, however, remained yet to be discharged, to which the mind of Mary never turned without a sudden thrill of more than common feeling, accompanied by a sudden rush of crimson to her cheek.

“I will do it,” she said, aloud, every time this thought presented itself, as if, from the very sound of her own voice she gained a certain kind of power to direct her energies into whatever course it might be her duty to pursue. “I *will* see her once more, that we may not part thus, and for ever. Cost me what it may, I will compel her to hear the truth. Our girlish friendship, her happiness, and my character, alike demand that there should be some explanation of the past. Martha was ever candid until now; I will not suffer her to believe I have

acted so base a part as circumstances would warrant her in supposing. And yet, but for the sake of her own peace, it would be almost better that I should; for what right have I to vindicate myself? I, who have so often voluntarily resigned the power to judge and act correctly, so that even now, in looking back, I scarcely see distinctly how far I have erred—only a dark, confused, and often shifting mass of indistinct images presents itself, amongst which, if nothing very criminal appears, I have no reason to thank my own watchfulness, or self-government.

Nor is it in reality the least important part of the consequences of such conduct as Mary had pursued, that on looking back, nothing can be seen distinctly. Surely this fact alone might furnish us with evidence sufficient, that nothing had been seen distinctly at the time, that there had been, in all our social and familiar intercourse with others, no clearness in our mental vision, to discern the pure, the just, and the true; and that having once resigned the power of judging rightly, we had thrown ourselves upon the mere accidents of passing time for the chance of acting as we ought.

Such were the reflections with which Mary's mind was engaged, as she pursued the once familiar way towards the residence of her early friends at Fleetwood, wishing, almost at every turn, that the way would lengthen as she went, so that the crisis of her arrival might be deferred; yet walking on with a determined step, and even forcing herself into so rapid a pace, that she could sometimes hear the beating of her own heart; more especially as she entered the avenue which led directly to the house, and where the very sound of the rustling boughs, and the clap of the gate as it closed

behind her, brought back the memory of times, when she had trod that path with far other feelings than those which occupied her now.

It was autumn, and the faded leaves were just beginning to flicker on the boughs with a tremulous motion, prophetic of their speedy fall. Even already, here and there, a few were scattered on the ground, leaving a thinner opening amongst the foliage, for the high windows of the house to gleam through, looking, Mary thought, when she glanced upward, as if they watched with jealous scrutiny her intruding steps. The rooks, too, sitting lightly on the boughs which they were about to leave for the long winter-months, were startled off by her approach, and, wheeling round in circles before they took their final flight, cawed hoarsely, and, as she thought, forebodingly, above her head. The idle dogs, long since grown weary of watching for their master's step, or listening to his well-known call, now lounged about the door; and, as if for very pastime, ran eagerly, and with impatient bark, to meet the adventurous stranger who should dare to tread upon what they seemed to consider as their own domain. Even to them, the voice and the form of Mary had grown strange, and she felt, with a weakness not peculiar to herself, how much these comparatively senseless creatures were capable of adding to the forlornness of her situation. It is a proof that we are poor in welcomes, when the accustomed cordial reception of a dog can make us shrink away repelled; and perhaps it was so with Mary at the present time, for she had well nigh yielded to a strong and natural impulse to turn away from that inhospitable greeting, and retrace her steps. It was but a momentary weakness, however, and Mary passed on. But the peculiar crisis on such

occasions is to knock at the closed door, and the peculiar trial is to await the result.

"Is your mistress at home?" said Mary to the servant who had been accustomed to open the door with a ready smile as she entered, but who now stood hesitatingly, and even stepped a little forward as if to prevent her going in.

"Is your mistress at home?" she asked again.

"Yes," replied the servant hesitatingly, "but"——

"But, she never sees company, you mean;" interrupted Mary. "Well, I will not detain her many minutes, if you would just let her know that I shall be glad to speak with her."

While saying this, Mary had actually walked past the servant, who still held the door, as if puzzled what to do in so delicate and difficult an emergency; when, as if suddenly recollecting himself, he hastened forward, and ushered the visitor into an apartment she had never occupied before.

"Be so good as to give that to your mistress," said Mary, placing in his hand a note, in which she had simply requested Martha to permit her an interview of a few minutes previous to her leaving home.

This was a daring step for Mary to take, after the decided manner in which all her attempts at a renewal of intimacy in that quarter had been repelled; but she knew of no other means of accomplishing her purpose, and she now waited with the most intense anxiety to learn what consequences her message would produce.

Long indeed was the suspense in which she was kept, for many were the doors that were heard to open and shut, and the feet which passed to and fro; but it seemed as if the long and gloomy apartment in which she was seated had no communication with any other part of the

house, so entirely, and for such a length of time, was she excluded from all participation in what was going on.

At last, a well-known voice was heard, a step approached, and Mary's heart beat audibly. It was Martha, her once familiar friend, now changed into the mere acquaintance—the mistress of Fleetwood—the squire's lady—anything, but the frank warm-hearted companion whose childhood had been shared with hers.

With a look which glanced slightly towards her guest, and then suddenly away, Martha approached, and actually held out her hand, but it was in a manner which seemed to say—"Thus far, but no farther; nor would I offer this civility, but that I am painfully constrained to do so?"

"Dear me," said Martha, "you must have been very cold; I see they have left the casement open." And without having seated herself, or made any pretence to do so, she hastened to the opposite side of the wide room, and, after closing the window, took the opportunity of adjusting several other matters, during which she asked in the most common-place and indifferent manner, after the health of Mr. and Mrs. Churchill; to which Mary replied in a manner equally indifferent and common-place.

It was astonishing how much Martha found to do in an apartment which presented an aspect of neatness and uniformity, only equalled by its coldness and want of welcome.

"I hope Fleet—— Mr. Fleetwood is better," said Mary, recollecting herself before the familiar name had quite escaped her lips.

"Mr. Fleetwood is better, thank you," replied Martha, with considerable emphasis; and at the same time flash-

ing a hasty glance at her guest, which indicated but too plainly that a long pent-up fire was ready to burst forth. It passed away, however, without any actual explosion; and Martha, who could not, in her own house, have been guilty of any decided breach of hospitality, now rang the bell, and giving her keys to the servant, desired him to bring out the wine and other refreshments.

“Not for me!” exclaimed Mary, with earnestness—
“Not for me!”

“Yes, I am sure you will take a glass of wine,” observed Martha, “after so long a walk. Bring what I tell you, James.” And the servant hastened to obey his orders.

“It is a thousand pities you should give yourself that trouble,” said Mary, “for I never take wine now, and I am not in the least degree fatigued.

“*You* never take wine!” exclaimed Martha, looking perfectly incredulous, and almost surprised into a smile; when suddenly resuming the distant and dignified part she seemed to have determined upon acting, she became again the mere acquaintance, and spoke of the weather, and the state of the roads, and all sorts of things, with the exception only of such as could awaken any kind of interest. At last, these failing her, she turned suddenly to Mary, and said, “In your note I think you speak of leaving home. Are you likely to be long absent?”

“Martha,” said Mary, who had long been struggling to nerve herself for the task which yet remained to be begun, “I have forced myself as an unwelcome guest into your presence, for the sole purpose of telling you what I have done, and what I am about to do. Is it with your permission that I speak?”

“Oh, certainly,” replied Martha, in the same indiffer-

ent tone ; but now her lace collar needed adjusting, and she was suddenly seized with an appetite for her own biscuits, which she broke into as many pieces, and occupied herself as much with, as she could.

"I should like you to hear me, if I do speak," observed Mary, after waiting some time, "and to hear me in a candid and friendly spirit, if you can."

"Go on," said Martha, "I will hear you if I must ; but the spirit in which I listen is not mine to command."

"Nor is the subject mine to choose," observed Mary, "or I would have selected any other, rather than myself, in speaking to you."

"You would have done well," said Martha ; "but go on, for I have not much time to lose."

"First, then," said Mary, "let me ask you one plain question—What is it that you think of me, and of my past conduct?"

It was evident that Martha was now struggling with her indomitable propensity to speak the whole truth, and to speak boldly out, whatever that truth might be ; still there was a natural shrinking—a feminine delicacy even in her, which forbade, in her own house, and to a once beloved and respected friend, so gross a violation of all the laws of kindness and civility, as she felt the simple act of speaking the whole truth on the present occasion must needs be.

"I ask you again," said Mary, "to tell me candidly what it is you are cherishing in your heart against me?"

This second appeal was too much for Martha's powers of self-restraint ; and with flushed cheek, and flashing eyes, she looked full into the face of her guest.

"What is it I think of you?" she repeated. "Since

you will compel me against my wish, and contrary to my determination to say ; you may perhaps as well know as not, that I think you a false friend, a dangerous associate, and a worthless woman. I think that you have for a long time wantonly played with my happiness, and your own respectability ; and that in short, you have been the cruel cause of the calamity which has fallen upon me and mine. I think all this of you and worse, though my lips have never uttered a syllable against you to any other ear than your own."

A long pause succeeded to this sweeping accusation, for which Mary was not exactly prepared, and the truth of which, considered as a whole, she was as little able to deny. There is perhaps no situation more trying than that of suffering under the severity of a charge of guilt, some portion of which is justly merited. By submitting to the whole, we sink lower than is necessary in the esteem of our friends : by pleading guilty to a part, we bring upon ourselves the suspicion of a dishonest and puerile attempt at exculpation from a full share of the blame we deserve. Under the pressure of these conflicting circumstances, when suddenly and unexpectedly brought into action, how often is the partially guilty sufferer tempted to disclaim the whole !

In the present instance, however, it was impossible for Mary to do this, even had her inclination directed her to so contemptible an expedient ; and she simply answered, "Worthless I am indeed, though not perhaps in the manner you suppose."

"With this confession," observed Martha, "I suppose your conscience will feel relieved ; and I am therefore at liberty to consider our conference as at an end."

"By no means !" exclaimed Mary. I came here

for the satisfaction of your mind, far more than my own."

"I am extremely obliged to you," replied the lady of the house, "for such an act of consideration; but I must assure you once for all, that whatever disquietude my mind may suffer, it is beyond your skill either to increase or diminish it."

"I do not think so," replied Mary, "for I am certain you labour under some misunderstanding with regard to your husband and myself."

"Speak of yourself," interrupted Martha, her indignation rising as she spoke. "My husband is now as far removed from the consciousness of evil, as he ought to be from the cruelty of blame."

"For that very reason," said Mary, still determined to speak—"because he cannot vindicate himself, I am come here for the last time to tell you the whole truth."

"I know it already," was Martha's prompt reply.

"Martha, you do not—you cannot know it."

"Why not? I am not blind, nor incapable of understanding."

"But you judge too hastily, and from appearances only. You think that because I was thoughtless, and foolish, and said many things I ought not to have said to your husband, such as speaking of you and your temper, with a freedom for which you cannot condemn me more than I condemn myself—you think that because there existed between Fleetwood and me this kind of intimacy, that there must have been more."

"And will you—I put it to your conscience—dare you declare to me that there was not?"

"I dare, Martha. I can look in your face with unflinching eyes. I can lay my hand upon my heart, and

as its secrets have never been concealed from you, I can now declare with a clear conscience, on this one point, that nothing ever passed between Fleetwood and myself beyond such intimacy as you have witnessed, and such conversation as I have already spoken of, and which I freely confess to have been a species of unfaithfulness to you, of which I bitterly repent, and which will remain through life to be a load upon my soul."

For some time after this Martha sat with her eyes fixed upon the ground, though the changing colour of her cheek betokened the conflicting emotions which struggled for mastery within her breast. Her lips, too, trembled, as if she would have spoken, but wanted the power; and when at last she looked suddenly full into the face of her friend, Mary saw that her eyes were filled with tears. It was a happy omen, confirmed by the altered tone of her voice, when, after many attempts, she once more resumed the conversation.

"Mary," said she, for the first time using this familiar name—"that you have come here to mock me in my calamity, I cannot believe; for you, too, look altered, and have had your sufferings, perhaps, more aggravated than my own. And yet I cannot think that, either, for there is one thought of agony connected with the past and you, which defies all comparison; and such a thought you cannot have. No; you have to contemplate the loss of your husband's mind—and in some measure I have that affliction, too—but you have not to look back to the loss of his affection, and to think that, while estranged from you, it was bestowed upon another."

"Dear Martha!" exclaimed Mary, "for I must call you dear once more, your husband was ever true to you in heart, so far as I am acquainted with his feelings; for



You must look for my Grave when spring returns.

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though I treacherously and culpably shared his confidence, with regard to the trials he sustained from your hasty and unguarded temper, I never heard a syllable from his lips which could lead me to suppose that his affections were really estranged from you."

"And you say this to me," asked Martha, with intense earnestness, "as you would answer at the bar of judgment, if you were now beyond the grave?"

"I do," said Mary, firmly. "I confess that there have been foolish compliments between us; I confess that I guiltily threw myself upon his confidence, by telling him even more than I told you of the trials of my own melancholy home; I confess that, owing to the habits I then indulged, I was often betrayed into acts of folly and inconsistency, of which a man of worse principles might have taken advantage, to the injury of my character; I confess all these things, and all are against me—forming such a mass of evidence, as would be sufficient for my condemnation in the opinion of the world; but you, Martha, were ever wont to be candid, generous, and true; and it is to you I look for a kinder judgment, when I tell you the plain and the entire truth; and in doing this, I repeat again, that from no word nor act on the part of your husband towards myself, have I the slightest reason to suppose that his affections were estranged from you."

"But you confess," said Martha, rather hastily, "that he complained to you of my temper?"

"Yes," replied Mary, "he did that frequently, and even talked of leaving his home entirely, and escaping to some foreign country, for the sake of living in peace."

"Did he say that?" asked Martha, with an appealing look to her friend. "Poor Fleetwood! he must have

been miserable, indeed, to think of leaving his child and—and me.”

“He was miserable sometimes,” observed Mary, “and I was miserable, too; and thus we fell more easily into the habit of complaining to each other.”

“Poor Fleetwood!” said Martha again, the tears now chasing each other rapidly down her cheeks. “I did not think I had ever made his home so wretched to him as that. Though too late to redeem the past, it is right that I should know the truth. Was there anything else he used to complain of besides my temper?”

“No, nothing—except that he sometimes asked whether I thought you really loved him, and I always told him you did.

“You said right, Mary, and I thank you a thousand times; but it is all too late now,” and Martha actually sobbed aloud.

“Too late?” asked Mary; “how should that be? They told me Fleetwood was better—quite sensible, and almost like himself again.”

Martha could only shake her head, as if to disclaim the truth of this assertion, while she wept more bitterly than before.

“What I heard was not true, then?” asked Mary.

“True in one sense it was,” replied the afflicted wife, “for better he certainly is, and I have the comfort of thinking he does not suffer; but his memory is almost entirely gone, and the most distressing part of his malady is, that whenever he does recollect himself, or when anything reminds him of the past, that fearful excitement of the brain returns again, which, above all things, is what I have most to dread. Thus I have to talk with him

almost as if he was a child, about present circumstances alone, and if I attempt to thwart or contradict him, he is instantly thrown back again into the worst paroxysms of his disorder. But I am going on talking of my own affairs, when I ought rather to have inquired the meaning of what you said, when you spoke of leaving home. Am I to understand that you are leaving your father's home entirely?"

"I am," replied Mary; "at least I am endeavouring to do so. I have for some time been in correspondence with a friend in London, on the subject of a situation, where I may provide for myself, and not be a burden to any one."

"You are not serious?" exclaimed Martha. "You cannot be really looking out for a situation?"

"I am, indeed," replied her friend, "and there is serious cause why I should do so. You know the losses my father has sustained. You know also the habits of our family, and how difficult it is for my mother to endure the least privation. Besides which, I am altered, Martha—much altered, since you saw me last. I feel as if twenty years of experience had rolled over my head since then. I have indeed suffered much, and thought much; and the result has been as I tell you—a clear conviction that it is my duty to seek a home elsewhere."

"And your father?" asked Martha: "What does he say to your leaving him in his old age?"

"I have tried him on that subject more than once," replied Mary, "and I am now fully convinced, that the feebleness, both of mind and body, which has for some time been gradually stealing over him, has so dimmed his perceptions, that he will scarcely feel any difference, when I am really gone."

Martha had now dried her tears, and regained her accustomed look, except that a more than wonted earnestness was indicated by the expression of her eyes—by the tone of her voice—and by her whole manner. Indeed she had the appearance of one who is pondering some question of momentous interest, which must be acted upon without delay.

“Mary,” said she, suddenly resuming the subject of their previous conversation, “I have never had occasion to doubt your sincerity when seriously put to the test. I now ask you again, and I do so from no mean motive, whether your conscience is clear as regards all real cause for the suspicions I have long harboured against you?”

“It is ;” repeated Mary, “except so far as I have confessed to you having been guilty of extreme folly, and of a long course of inconsiderate conduct arising from so many roots of evil, that I can only wonder I have not been permitted to perish, from the consequences of my own imprudence.”

“If then you have told me the truth,” resumed Martha, “as I cannot but believe, I have a proposition to make you, which is, of all the evidence I could give you, the most convincing proof how implicitly I depend upon your word. As you say you are really looking out for a situation in which you may be useful, and independent, will you come and take charge of my neglected child?”

“You are not serious, Martha !” exclaimed Mary in her turn.

“I am indeed,” replied her friend. “I have been looking out for a suitable person to whom I might commit this precious charge ; for to me it is now impossible that I should fulfil the duties of a mother ; and though a few

hours ago, you were the last person in the world I would have admitted into my family in this capacity, I now ask you with all sincerity, if I can so arrange it as not to interfere with my husband's tranquillity of mind, whether you will come and live with me on the same terms I should have proposed to an indifferent person?"

Overcome by the generous confidence of her early friend, it was now Mary's turn to weep, nor could she find words to express the gratitude of her heart for this most unexpected termination to a long-dreaded interview. Trembling under a consciousness of having deserved much, if not all, the blame attaching to her conduct, she had sought only the pardon of her friend; and now an opportunity was offered her of proving to that friend how sincere was her repentance for the past, how ardent her desire of amendment for the future. There is nothing so constraining, nothing so powerful in its influence, nothing so overwhelming to a grateful heart, as these unexpected openings for the exercise of better resolutions; and Mary had of late become more capable than she ever was before, of appreciating her mercies as she ought.

The plan proposed by Martha did not require any great length of time for consideration. Had Mary been guilty of any lurking insincerity towards her friend, she could not have entered upon so sacred a charge, beneath a roof whose hospitality she must in that case have felt conscious of violating; but having confessed all, which she did on different occasions before the agreement was finally settled, she had no hesitation in becoming a member of the household at Fleetwood, where every comfort and accommodation was offered which the altered circumstances of the family allowed her the opportunity of enjoying.

“I shall be jealous of you now,” said Martha in a good-natured and almost playful manner; “for winning from me the affections of my boy. But you must not mind me, if I am. It is the inevitable consequence of being situated as we are. Only be kind to him; that is all I ask.”

It was so arranged between the two friends, that Mary, though an inmate of the house, should never on any occasion be brought in contact with the almost unconscious invalid; yet by degrees, from her habitual walks with the child about the grounds, and gardens, he became accustomed to a figure, which though dimly recollected, appeared not to awaken any dangerous excitement; and Martha might well be excused, if in making this discovery she experienced a heightened satisfaction from the evidence it afforded, that her friend had never been an object of deeper interest than herself.

Under this agreeable conviction, the experiment at last was made of introducing Mary more directly to Fleetwood's notice, and though for some time it seemed doubtful what might be the result, it proved in the end that her quiet manners, and more especially her gentle voice, had rather a soothing than an irritating influence upon his mind.

It was a great shock to Mary to see how that mind was changed—how the bold and manly spirit had shrunk as it were into a state of second childhood. Yet scarcely that either, for Fleetwood could still converse rationally and like himself about common things; he could amuse himself with his garden, and with short walks about his fields, in which his wife was his inseparable companion; but in the company of several persons, or where any combination of ideas or images was pressed upon him,

more especially when his inclination or his will were crossed, he appeared sometimes suddenly to lose himself, and at others to be affected with a kind of nervous irritability which was still more distressing.

And Mary used to look on, and see all this, and mark how patiently and meekly Martha bore with all her husband's fretful humours; and then her thoughts would suddenly go back to the gay party met amongst the rocks on that bright summer's day, when his light step was foremost in that giddy throng, and when that leafy dell rung with the echo of his joyous laugh. And, oh! to have been able to recall that day—that hour—that fatal moment—to have dissevered herself and her own follies from all participation in that awful scene! There could be no wonder that Mary after losing herself in these recollections should sometimes be suddenly betrayed into a wildness of look, and an incoherence of words and manner, scarcely surpassed by that of the now almost unconscious participator in all which she most regretted of the dark and fearful past.

For these painful reflections however, she felt at times as if more than compensated by the kindness and confidence of her early friend, between whom and herself everything had been so entirely explained, that no cause was left for the shadow of suspicion on either side; and thus, as in the days of their girlish love, the two companions were reunited, both having suffered much which tended to make their union more complete.

For some time it was an incomprehensible mystery to Martha, in the administration of her habitual kindness, which left no bodily requirement unsupplied, why her friend should so strictly and scrupulously avoid all participation in those accustomed indulgences, to which the

weak are too apt to resort as a means of temporary strength, and the sorrowful as a means of consolation.

"That my husband should not be permitted even to see such stimulants set before him, I can well understand," said Martha one day to her friend. "I have seen enough of their effect upon him, to know that the less he is reminded of their existence the better. But your case is so different, you sometimes look so pale and wan, and, you have gone through so much, besides which, your former habits were so opposite to your present rule, that I cannot help fearing you must suffer from the want of something to support you."

"You are right," said Mary with an expression of deep feeling in her countenance, "I do want something to support me; but Martha, it must be something essentially different from that which you propose; for it is to that very habit of applying to bodily stimulus to support a weak and disordered mind, that I attribute more than half the follies and the sins of my past life. Not that I ever was what the world calls intemperate. My very soul would have revolted from the thought, but the evil grew upon me unawares. Recommended at first by my medical adviser, and much more afterwards by my own experience of its power to mitigate the sufferings of the moment, I was led on step by step until my whole life became more like a dream than a reality, presenting nothing distinct enough for conscience to lay hold of in the way of reproof, nor yet sufficiently satisfactory to take home to my heart as a real consolation. Thus then the evil grew, and the more I deviated in my own conduct from the strict line of propriety, the more I acted counter to my few remaining convictions of duty, the more I strove to lull myself to rest by this insidious means of procuring

temporary relief. I repeat, that I do want something to support me, for I am very weak, and sometimes very wretched; but I feel increasingly that this support must not be derived from any earthly means; and in my humble endeavours to seek it from the only true and lasting source, I now ask you, my best and my earliest friend, to aid me with your prayers."

"From my own experience of the past, and from my observation of human life in general, I have learned to believe that we need the possession of all our faculties in their healthiest and most efficient state, to enable us to detect those innumerable tendencies to evil, by which the path of every human being along the journey of life is beset; and for the future, I am determined, with the assistance of that Power, upon whom alone I can depend for strength, so to resist temptation, that suffer what I may, I will submit to the chastening of his hand, and the just punishment of my own transgressions, without attempting again to lull myself into this false repose, or to fortify myself by artificial means against the calamities incident to human life.

CHAP. IX.

FIRESIDE RECOLLECTIONS.

AMONGST my happiest recollections, and those which, late in life, I am still able distinctly to recall, is the picture of my father's fireside, as it was in the days of my childhood, when we lived in a pleasant residence on the outskirts of a little country town, in the south of England. My father was then a fine and noble-looking man—at least, so I have heard, and so he appeared to me; though recent impressions might possibly have effaced the distinct character of his features, but for a painting—by no mean artist—of which, amongst many losses, I have still retained possession, and which reminds me more forcibly than any other object, of that stage of my early life which I am now about to describe.

The picture I speak of represents a man about five-and-thirty years of age, tall and commanding in his figure, with dark hair and eyes, and with a smile upon his lips which indicates a tendency to social enjoyment. Indeed, that such was my father's character, I can distinctly recollect; for the very sound of his returning step when he entered the door, was a signal for general rejoicing throughout our house. My brother James, the oldest in the family, used to jump up from the lessons he

was learning for the following morning—my two sisters used to lay down their work, to tell or to hear the pleasant tales of the day; William, the brother next in age to myself, used to follow his mother into the hall to join in the welcome, while I used to hide myself behind the great chair that was drawn ready, in order that I might spring out and enjoy the well-feigned surprise of my father, as soon as he was seated by the fire.

And all this while my mother was so quiet, that a stranger would scarcely have supposed she was more than commonly pleased; but we could all see that her blue eyes never looked so bright, nor her smile so happy, as when, after a long day's absence, my father was once more seated by her side.

And then the house we lived in—I have never seen a parlour so comfortable as that in which my childhood was spent. Indeed, every nook and corner of that home was full of comfort. There was comfort in the very hall—comfort in the kitchen—comfort in the chambers; but, most of all to me, in the little closet of a room I occupied adjoining to my mother's, where she used to come in a morning to dress, and read her Bible, and pray, after closing the white curtains around my bed, and bidding me not look out nor speak to her until she told me it was time to rise.

One great reason why I loved my little room so well, was because it looked out upon the garden; and William and I were fond, almost to foolishness, of flowers. I might have said of fruit as well; for a cherry-tree, that never failed of its rich and rosy burden, grew against that side of the house where I slept, and, far as my arm could stretch out of the window, the closely-stripped branches in the early summer told of my love for forbidden things,

long before the cherries were considered to be fit for general use.

Nor was it my love of fruit or flowers alone, which made that garden so lovely in my eyes, for all the year round it was beautiful to me—beautiful because William loved it, and because I loved William, if possible, better than myself. And he was a boy to be loved; for if ever there was a sweet and gentle creature in human form—full of deep thoughts, yet happy as a summer bird—that creature was my brother. His very look revealed the sweetness of his soul, though you must have known him well, to dive into its secret depths. I have heard that, in all this, he was like my mother; but of her my recollections are not so distinct, and when I endeavour to look back into the far dim past, her countenance presents itself too often veiled behind a mist of tears.

At the time of which I speak, however, tears were almost unknown amongst us; or if ever they were made to flow, from a consciousness of our own misdeeds, or the just punishment my father sometimes inflicted, it was thought so sad and dreadful a thing to have done wrong, that we all pitied more than we blamed the offender. Under these visitations of parental displeasure, I believe I was the most frequent sufferer, and perhaps in reality I cared the least; for I remember being as happy as ever again, so soon as I was set at liberty to run in the garden with William, who used always to be doubly kind to me on such occasions; though he would sometimes say to me, rather more seriously than I liked,—“If I were you, Edith, I would never do so again.”

Once—and only once, that I can recollect—it was William's hard lot to fall under the displeasure of his parents, and then indeed we were all in trouble. My

mother wept as much as we did, and the poor boy himself seemed as if his very heart was broken; for he was not calculated to bear harsh treatment; and kind, and free, and playful as my father generally was, he could, when much displeased, be violent and severe. Perhaps he had, all the while, strong passions hid behind a smiling exterior, only that his easy circumstances, and most exemplary wife, rendered the occasions very few, for calling such passions into exercise.

As children, we were not able to judge of the degree of talent possessed by either of our parents, though everything my father said seemed to us, even then, to have some point and meaning; while even in his lightest moods he would blend instruction with his play. He was fond, too, of droll stories, and quaint witticisms, which I have understood from others, rendered him, in the society of men of his own standing, a choice companion at the social board. And I can well believe it, for when we had company at home, though the conversation was beyond my powers of comprehension, I could see that my father was looked up to by all; and that when he chose to be amusing, which he usually did, his hearty and good-natured laugh made every one else look pleased and merry too.

In short, we were all proud of my father, though some of us were too young to know exactly why; but my mother's example, in the deference she paid him, and the general tone of her behaviour and conversation, tended very much to confirm the idea that he was a man whom any children might have been proud to look up to as a father.

Perhaps of all the family I was myself the most possessed with this idea, not only because I had the

greatest tendency to pride, as a part of my own nature ; but because my father was accustomed to single me out as a sort of household pet ; and whenever he settled himself down in his arm-chair for a quiet fireside chat, I was the one to climb upon his knee, and to claim the privilege of absorbing the greatest share of his attention.

But of all the evenings we spent together as a happy and united family, those of the Sabbath are what I recollect as the purest pictures of home-enjoyment. We were accustomed to have each of us a hymn ready to repeat as soon as my father was at liberty, or disposed to hear us ; and when I had proudly taken my place beside his knee, and William had gone, as he always did, to my mother, James would begin first, and then my two sisters, then William, and last of all my own hymn was repeated with my father's hand resting kindly on my shoulder, and his smile ever ready to reward me when I did well. We then all sung a hymn together, and then the evening closed with a chapter of the Bible chosen by my mother, and prayer.

I have said that my recollections of my mother are a good deal effaced by the lapse of years ; yet her look, her figure, her attitude on these occasions, I never can forget, more especially after the failure of her health, when she looked so pale in the morning, and in the evening so beautiful and bright, that William, who was the very image of his mother, with all his youth and bloom and softly curling hair, was scarcely more lovely than the parent whose gentle arms were so often twined around his neck.

But why prolong these recollections ? My mother, always delicate, began to fade like some sweet and drooping flower. We thought her somewhat fretful too,

and sometimes I ventured just to say, "how hastily my mother speaks," when William always took her part, and even told me that he knew she had some secret griefs not fit for us to be acquainted with; for he had asked her once if she was happy, and she had wept so bitterly, he never meant to ask her such a question again.

A tale of secret grief is always interesting both to young and old, and from this time I often pondered the subject in my mind, without the power of understanding what my mother's grief could be. I even blamed her, though I dared not say so, for cherishing sad thoughts, when it seemed to me that my father was more disposed than ever to be cheerful and good-humoured. Indeed I blamed them all; for when he returned in the evening so playful and so gay, neither my elder brother nor my sisters joined in our amusements; but some looked angry, others left the room, and my poor father, as I thought one of the most ill-treated of men, was often left with me alone to spend the remainder of the evening as we chose.

Once, however, and that was at the close of a Sabbath day—a sad day, and never to be forgotten while I live—the truth flashed forcibly upon me, that something must be wrong, even with the parent I admired so much, and to whom I had always been so devotedly attached. We had collected as usual round the fire, for it was a winter's night, and James and my sisters had repeated their hymns, and William, leaning against his mother's chair, was just preparing to begin, when my father started up, and throwing the bible I had held in my hand upon the table, declared in a stern voice that he would listen no longer to such folly. We might go on if we liked, but for his part, if he could hear nothing else at his own fireside, he must try to find amusement elsewhere.

My mother, I remember, did not speak. She seemed indeed like one struck dumb, and William said she trembled all over, and that her hand became cold as death. She did not even rise from her seat, as my father rushed hastily past her, and out into the hall, leaving us all in a state of silent terror, too terrible to be described.

From that time my mother grew rapidly worse, so much so, that we were only occasionally admitted into the chamber, which she never left. This room had an air of dulness and melancholy little suited to my disposition, for I had an untameable spirit, and liked nothing so much as liberty, and the exercise of my own free will; but William was more in his element here, than even in the garden, which his own hands and mine had planted with flowers. He was in his element, because to be near his mother, was the greatest happiness he enjoyed; and she, in her turn, seemed to cling to the gentle boy, with the yearning fondness of one who is about to leave an object of intense affection for ever.

“Edith,” said William to me, one day as we sauntered in the garden while this sweet sufferer was asleep, “do you know that my mother is going to die?”

“Who told you that?” I inquired.

“She told me so herself;” replied my brother.

“Oh, don’t believe it! I exclaimed, “for you know the poor woman in the lane cried out that she was going to die, when she had only hurt her foot.”

“But my mother’s is no hurt of that kind,” said William, with a foreboding shake of the head; “she has for a long time been growing worse; and if there was nothing else to kill her, I think my father’s conduct would.”

"My father! what do you mean, William?" I asked with eagerness.

My brother drew close to me, and answered in a whisper, "I am afraid, Edith, my father is a very wicked man; I heard him speak to my mother in such a passion yesterday, and she has been crying ever since."

There is a tendency in all young minds to attach ideas of perfection to the parents from whom instruction, kindness, and protection are alike derived; and it is only by a process of cruel and forcible conviction, that this natural and pleasing idea can be entirely destroyed.

Such was my own impression with regard to the superiority of my father's natural endowments, and such my admiration of his person and character in general, that the charges brought against him by my brother appeared at once incredible and unjust; and, rather than admit the possibility of a shadow being thrown upon my earthly idol—for such, in reality, my father was—I turned hastily with injurious thoughts towards those who were less capable than myself of judging unkindly. In short, I spoke hardly of my mother—of the gentlest being in the whole world—and of that brother who inherited, along with her beauty, the superior graces of her mild and chastened spirit. Yet, all the reproof this brother gave me, was a sad and solemn warning, that I might have to repent of my harsh words, when that sweet mother should be sleeping in the grave, to which she appeared to be so fast hastening.

"William," said I, "do you really think my mother will die?"

"As surely," he replied, "as that rose will be faded by to-morrow morning!"

We were walking in our garden when this conversa-

tion took place, along a beautiful terrace of green turf, which sloped down to the banks of a gently-flowing stream, overhung by the light-green branches of a willow, beneath which we had a sort of rustic seat, where William and I used to spend so many of our happiest hours; and it is in connection with the sunny picture of this familiar scene, that I recollect receiving the first serious impressions of what would be our forlorn situation if deprived of the care of so anxious and kind a parent.—And a long time we sat that day beneath the willow, talking of many strange and solemn things connected with our half-formed ideas of death, and the world beyond the grave. By myself, I believe these thoughts would not have moved me, for I was quick and volatile in my disposition, and little disposed to serious contemplations of any kind; but William was of a totally different temperament, and, happy as he was in early childhood—happy amongst the flowers, the sunshine, and the birds of spring; happier still in the companionship of those he loved—there was a sort of premature and prophetic sadness gathering over his soul, and gaining force from the deeply-cherished thought of death which seemed at this time to be perpetually present with him.

The system of education pursued in our family was but little calculated to discipline either my brother's mind or mine, to any useful purpose; for, with the change which had lately come over my father, we could not but perceive an increasing tendency to curtail his domestic expenses; and one fact which came under my own observation, in connection with this feeling, tended more powerfully than any other, to shake my confidence in his propriety of feeling in general. It had been frequently

urged by the doctor who attended my mother, that she should try the benefit of removal to a more genial climate; and one day, when not aware of my presence, I heard my mother express, with the utmost deference to my father's wishes, her own desire that the experiment should be made.

"I know," she said, "it would be an expensive and troublesome business, reduced as I now am; and I am fully aware, also, that it would not effectually remove the disease under which I labour; but, when I think of my poor children, I own I should like to make the effort, and perhaps it might be blessed to me in the continuance of my life a few years longer. What do you say, my love? Are you quite sure that we cannot afford it?"

"Quite," replied my father in a sullen tone, as he drew from his pocket-book a bundle of papers; and throwing them down beside my mother, he continued, in a harsher tone—"Look there! examine those bills, and judge for yourself, whether we are in a condition to go about in search of pleasure to places of fashionable resort."

From the low seat I occupied beside the fire, I could distinctly see my mother's countenance, and I could not but observe how it changed at that moment, from its accustomed hue of blue and almost transparent paleness, to a bright-crimson flush, which spread all over her cheeks and forehead, while her hand trembled so violently that she could scarcely hold the papers which she still seemed anxious to examine. At last she opened one much longer than the rest, and after glancing at the bottom of the page, she raised her large blue eyes, and fixed them directly upon my father's face. I never saw a look like that; I hope I shall never see another so full of

painful meaning. My mother spoke not, however, perhaps she could not speak, for her lips, now paler than ever, began to quiver; while her eyes filled with tears, which rolled rapidly down her cheeks; and still she looked at my father, as if her soul would have spent itself in that last appeal.

I believe a long fainting-fit, or something worse, ensued after this sad scene, for the servants were called in, and the doctor sent for; yet, such was my curiosity about the papers, that, while everybody seemed to be engaged around my mother, I took up the long page, so closely written, and in so fair a hand, that I could read without difficulty the name of a wine-merchant with whom I knew my father to be intimate, and glancing downwards, I saw that the catalogue contained a variety of items of one character, such as I remember to have felt ashamed of for my father's sake. I thought, however, that perhaps my mother's illness had occasioned much of this extraordinary demand; and having settled the matter in this way to my own satisfaction, it troubled me no further, than to make me wonder how so kind a man as my father always had appeared, should have spoken to his wife in that harsh and sullen tone.

In consequence of the sudden and alarming accession of disease which took place on this occasion, my mother was removed from all participation in our domestic arrangements, and my father, now frequently sullen, and at other times irritable in the extreme, took upon himself the entire management of us, and all our affairs. From that time, the comfort of our fireside was gone; for, though my father occasionally returned home more jocular and gay than ever, there was a peevishness in his play which spoiled all our enjoyment, and a folly in his mirth which

disgusted my older sisters, until they would not join in his amusements.

With all my partiality, I too began to see my father with different eyes, and being of a hasty and impetuous temperament, my feelings towards him would, in all probability, have assumed the character of dislike, had he not on one memorable occasion, suddenly and unexpectedly awakened my compassion instead. We were leaving the room, one after another, as soon as he had come in, I as usual the last, for I had scarcely then learned to think his playfulness and vivacity not such as might be shared in and enjoyed by his children; and such was my love of cheerfulness and drollery, that, but for the influence of the rest of the family, I should have continued much longer than I did, to meet my father with a joyous welcome on his return to his own fireside. Seeing, however, that the symptoms of dissatisfaction, and even of disgust, were becoming stronger and more evident in the behaviour of my brothers and sisters, I also caught the infection, and was escaping from the presence of my father on the evening already alluded to, when he called me back in a kind and earnest voice, and asked me why I was going away.

"I don't know, father," said I. "Do you want me for anything?"

"Come hither, child," said my father; and he drew me close to his side, and lifting me upon his knee, remained for sometime silent, with his burning forehead resting on my shoulder.

"Is anything the matter, father?" I asked—but he was still silent; and I felt such hot big tears upon my arm; and then he actually sobbed, as if his heart was breaking.

Astonished at this unwonted emotion, the thought very naturally occurred to me, that my mother must be dead or dying ; and I ventured to ask if it was not so.

"Not yet," my father replied, in a low and broken voice ; "perhaps, Edith, I shall die first."

"What can you mean !" I exclaimed. "You are not ill, surely ?" and I pressed him again to tell me if anything was the matter.

"Matter enough !" was his almost inarticulate reply ; but he quickly changed his manner, and asked me suddenly, if I would like to help him to become a better man, a better father, and a better husband ?

"How can I help you, father ?" I inquired.

"Edith," said he, "do you ever pray ?"

"Oh, yes !" I replied, "or how could I dare to sleep ? I pray as my mother taught me a long time ago, and now that I grow older, and think more than I did, I find more need to pray."

"Do you ever pray for me, Edith ?" asked my father, in so melancholy and touching a tone, that the sound seems still to vibrate in my ear.

"I pray that you may live long, and die happily," I replied.

"But you must do more than that, Edith," said my father. "You must pray that I may be kept from one cruel enemy that besets me wherever I go—an enemy that has already ruined the prospects of my children, and broken their mother's heart. Nor is this all. You must bear with me, Edith, more than the others do, because I have loved you better, and because I cannot bear, when everybody else turns away from me, to be left as an object of contempt by my youngest and dearest child."

Such were my father's words ; and though at the time I wondered at their strangeness, more than I understood their meaning, yet the frequency with which this novel and incomprehensible scene recurred to my mind, impressed it upon my memory with a distinctness which time has not been able to efface.

It is possible that the near approach of my mother's death might have been the cause, not only of my father's sadness that evening, but also of his unwonted abstemiousness about that time ; for he staid much at home, and it was not many days before we were all called into her room to see her for the last time.

It is astonishing how insensible the minds of children sometimes are, to all impressions of solemnity. An indefinite sensation of fear, derived from what is gloomy and mysterious, is evinced by all ; and on that occasion, I perfectly remember to have shrunk back appalled from the darkened chamber, more struck at the moment with the melancholy and unusual aspect of all around me, than with the still fond and lingering look of a dying parent, as she lay almost insensible upon the pillow which was scarcely whiter than her own faded and hollow cheek. I suppose my brother William understood and felt more than I did of this solemn scene. Indeed, he was the only one amongst us permitted to go in and out of my mother's chamber whenever he liked, at her particular request ; and thus he had become familiarized to all which took place there, in a manner wholly incomprehensible to me. Still he could hardly have been prepared for the last great change taking place so soon, for I remember he was kneeling by the side of her bed in a perfect agony of grief, covering the thin blue hand he held in his, with his kisses and his tears.

Beyond this, I do not recollect much in connection with my mother's death, except that the funeral occupied us all a good deal; and I am almost ashamed to say, that my new black dress, very fashionably made, tended greatly to alleviate the sorrow which at times I really felt. Of one fact, however, in connection with our irreparable loss, I was painfully sensible—that the comfort, the peace, the respectability of our home was gone. We had a wealthy and kind uncle, who probably felt this too, for he took away my sisters and my oldest brother, and from that time provided for them himself.

William and I were consequently left alone, and it became the business of my life to beguile my poor brother of the grief which preyed upon his tender and susceptible mind. For this I claim no merit. It was in self-defence that I reasoned with, and endeavoured to amuse him; for I could not bear the perpetual sadness which sat upon his brow, and I was soon rewarded by seeing again on his placid countenance, that peculiar smile in which he so much resembled his lost mother.

Left to ourselves through the greater part of every day, and only occasionally visited by a very careless master, who had undertaken our education for a trifling remuneration, we amused ourselves sometimes in the garden, and sometimes in my father's library, with books which were more fascinating than intelligible to minds like ours. A world of indistinct and unprofitable ideas were thus presented to our imaginations, at a time of life when the intellect should more properly be strengthened; and if I was not so great a sufferer as my brother from this dangerous method of acquiring knowledge, it was owing to my natural disposition being less capable of all that is exquisite in pain or pleasure.

It is a strange anomaly in human nature, that loveliness, whether of mind or person, does not always obtain love. It must have appeared to an unprejudiced observer almost as a thing impossible not to have loved my brother William; but to have lived with him beneath the same roof, to have shared his familiar thoughts, and witnessed his daily conduct, and still not to have loved him, would have argued a heart incapable of every sentiment of admiration or affection.

Such, however, was the fearful perversion of my father's feelings, and such the dominion of evil over his whole soul, that from the time of my mother's death, this heavenly-minded boy appeared to become the subject of his peculiar and most unnatural aversion. I have called him heavenly-minded, because, though for a time beguiled into a train of foolish and unprofitable thoughts, by the course of reading he too eagerly pursued, his conscience was too tender, and his mind too seriously impressed by the earnest counsels of his mother, to permit him to wander far from the path of religious duty, which she had spent her last strength in recommending him to pursue. Thus one book after another was laid down, as not being such as his mother would have approved, while at the same time, the pages of the sacred volume were more frequently opened, as containing passages upon which that mother had fondly dwelt, as her only consolation in seasons of trial and distress.

To the same extent, however, as William appeared to be preparing for a happier and holier state of existence, my father evinced towards him a degree of anger and contempt, called forth by the most trivial occasions, and only to be accounted for upon the principle of evil being in everything opposed to what is good. In fact,

poor William could scarcely speak or move without irritating my father's now uncertain temper ; though towards myself he still continued those occasional expressions of fondness, to which, happily for us both, I never became wholly insensible. In my presence too, but especially when alone with him, he was sometimes too painfully communicative, and even spoke of the besetting sin which had bound him under its cruel and malignant tyranny.

Not that any explanation was now needed for his inconsistent, and sometimes violent conduct ; for the cause had become sufficiently evident to every one connected with our family ; and though slow to believe it myself, I had now gained knowledge and experience enough to place the humiliating fact before me, too plainly to admit of the shadow of a doubt.

Repulsive as this conviction was, and often as it made me shrink from my father's kiss with feelings of indelible bitterness and shame, the affecting appeals he still continued to make to me in his better moments, and the abject humiliation with which he implored me not to forsake him as every one else had done, renewed the often-broken chain of familiar and affectionate intercourse between us, and placed us again in the natural and endearing position of parent and child.

It cannot be denied, however, that there were dark passages in my life, when my very soul revolted from such intercourse ; when the proud spirit I possessed by nature, was roused to indignation ; and when the impetuosity and warmth of the language which burst from my lips, was in danger of bringing down upon my undaunted brow the actual violence of a hand not always under the control either of reason or affection. Never

was this the case so much as when I saw my brother William treated with harshness or injustice, his gentle spirit wounded by injurious suspicion, and even the indulgences of common kindness denied to one whose delicate and gentle frame demanded more than usual consideration.

It may be imagined then, what were my feelings on one memorable day, when my father coming home earlier than usual, found my brother and myself busily engaged in examining some old books on the highest shelves of his study. This apartment we had a few days before been forbidden to enter, and it was only at my earnest solicitation, and by showing that my father was not himself when this injunction was laid upon us, that William had been prevailed on to gratify my curiosity at the expense of his own feelings. There were works in that library which I had heard spoken of as dangerous and improper to be read ; and, determined to examine them for myself, I had, without stating the grounds of my eagerness, so overcome my brother's scruples as to induce him to climb upon the back of a high chair, in order to obtain the hidden treasure ; and he was in this critical position, balanced with one foot on the chair, and the other on the book-shelves, when I detected the sound of my father's step in the passage leading to the door.

"Come down, William !" said I, "this instant. I hear my father." But the moment for escape was already passed, and, colouring deeply, William stood still, looked round, and actually smiled upon his father.

It was the work of a moment—that terrible and fiendish blow. There was a crash, a heavy fall, a faint subdued scream, a low moan ; and the next instant I was lifting up my clenched hand, and defying my father to his face.

It was the work of a moment—and before my brother had time to crawl from beneath the chair which had fallen with him, my arms were around him, and I was endeavouring to soothe away some agonizing pain, which distorted his beautiful features, and forced the heavy tear-drops from his eyes.

Unable to lift my brother from the ground, and finding him quite incapable of making any effort to raise himself, I called to my father to help me; but he stood looking on with such an expression of countenance as I fain at this moment would forget, and even laughed a loud and unnatural laugh, to see the work of mischief his own cruel hand had done.

But the conflicting feelings of that dreadful scene it would be impossible to describe. There lay the helpless sufferer, scarcely daring so much as to moan; and there stood my father, evidently making the most of every malignant and bitter feeling, as if to hide what little remains of a more human nature stirred in secret in his breast.

It is sufficient to add, that from the stroke of a parent's hand, my brother received so serious an injury, as to deprive him of the use of one limb; and instead of his light and bounding step, that used to chase the young lambs in the early spring, he had ever afterwards to support himself on crutches; and in this manner he often stood by the threshold of our door, on fine summer days, watching with tearful eyes the joyous gambols of children just let loose from school, or of merry boys making pastime of the errands upon which they went.

Fond as I was of my brother's company, it was impossible for me to be always with him now, our reduced expenditure rendering my presence indispensable in

the management of our household affairs, and my own health and spirits requiring that I should sometimes indulge myself with the refreshment of a country walk, in which he was unable to accompany me. From these walks I generally returned laden with his favourite wild flowers, or with whatever I could find to afford him interest; and my reward was more than enough when I saw a smile steal over the features which had begun to settle into a premature and habitual sadness, too plainly indicative of the life of sorrow and suffering he was leading.

In one of these country walks, it was my happiness to meet with a beautiful and affectionate little dog, to be disposed of by a poor family, whose circumstances affected me powerfully at the time, as bearing a painful resemblance to our own, and the thought instantly flashed upon me, that William would like the little dog for a companion in his solitary hours.

It was at the door of a mean and wretched-looking hovel, that I first saw the little animal at play with two lovely children, and, stopping to admire it, was accosted by a miserable-looking woman from within, who asked me whether I was in want of a dog like that, adding that she was too poor to keep it; and should be glad to find it a comfortable home.

“But your children cannot spare it;” I observed, looking to the boy and girl, whose eyes filled with tears as they crept closer to their little favourite, and looked alternately at it, and then at me, with such an imploring expression, that I could not have taken it from them, unless urged to do so a second time by the mother, who grew more earnest, as she saw how strongly I was tempted to accept her offer.

"Perhaps you will ask too high a price?" said I, still hesitating, "I have very little money to spend upon what is useless; but I have a lame brother at home who is often very lonely, and I know he would like the dog even better than I should myself."

At the sound of the word "price," the countenance of the poor woman changed; and though evidently not less pleased than surprised, she declared that she had entertained no idea of selling the animal, for which she only asked a comfortable home. "Not," she added, raising her apron to her eyes, "that any trifle you may choose to give, can be a matter of indifference, for I do assure you, Miss, I have not eaten a morsel to-day, except one mouthful of bread with my half-pint of beer."

Affected by what I firmly believed to be the truth of this story, I questioned the poor woman as to the cause of her present destitution, for on approaching the door of her house, I could see that it was almost without furniture, and entirely devoid of comfort of every description.

"Have you a husband?" I asked.

"Yes," replied the woman in a low, choking voice.

"I suppose he has no work, then?" I continued.

"He might have plenty;" was the concise reply.

"Perhaps he is disabled?" I asked again.

"Only disabled through intemperance," said the woman; and I asked no more. The secret of her wretchedness I was now able fully to comprehend. I knew too well how and why she was so poor and destitute, to need any farther explanation; and offering her all the money I could then call my own, I turned again to the

children, and asked them whether they would let me have the dog, if I promised to use it well, and to bring it sometimes to see them ?

The boy, who was the older of the two, probably seeing that the doom of his little favourite was sealed, looked sullen and vexed, and covering his face with the ragged cap which he held in one hand, thrust away the animal with the other, as much as to say—"There, take it if you will, and if you have the heart to deprive me of it."

There was nothing left for me but to make sure of my business before I had time to realize the pain I was inflicting ; and, snatching up my treasure, I hastened home with it at my utmost speed.

Never shall I forget the countenance of my brother William, nor how it lighted up with more than delight on discovering what I had brought him ; but more especially on finding that his caresses were not bestowed in vain, upon a quick and sensitive creature, which seemed as if by instinct it could understand the gentle and loving spirit of the master whose property it was henceforth to be. To William, however, there was no perfect joy. He breathed an atmosphere of disappointment, while fear and apprehension were mixed with everything in which his young heart rejoiced. It was so even in this instance, and, looking suddenly into my face, he said with drooping lip.—" But we don't know yet, Edith, whether my father will let me have it or not."

It was the first time this thought had struck me, and I too saw the difficulty ; for everything that William loved, my father found some reason for depriving him of, and we both felt together, without venturing to express our thoughts, that the more fondness he bestowed

upon this new favourite, the more likely my father would be to hate and even to destroy it; we therefore agreed between ourselves, that the dog should be mine, that, as I had been the purchaser, I would take all the consequences, and that William should carefully abstain from bestowing any attention upon it in my father's presence.

There are few persons addicted to favourites of this kind, who have not had to feel at times as if the dog, the cat, or whatever it might be, upon which their favour was bestowed, was possessed with a spirit of perverseness, inspiring them with an ill-timed determination to do the very thing they ought not. My brother's dog, or, as I called it, mine, was no exception to this rule; for though amiable in the extreme on other occasions, whenever my father was present, it used to run and jump about my brother, and whine and fawn upon him, as if to win back again the notice he only suspended at such times; and the more indifferent he appeared to its caresses, the more impetuous and uncontrollable it became.

At last my father discovered our secret. He had never liked the dog, and only at my entreaties had permitted it to remain an inmate of the house. But now he seemed to cast an evil eye upon it, and often, when more than usually elated, would make it the subject of such cruel sport, that William told me one day, with a bitterness in his voice and manner which I had never witnessed before, that he thought he should kill the dog himself, to spare it the torture my father was so fond of inflicting.

And here let me pause a moment to observe, what a contaminating influence has evil of every kind, when



The Evening Hymn.

Published by T. Agnew & Sons, London & Bristol.

deliberately and knowingly indulged. Nothing could be more odious, either to my brother, or myself, than the vice to which my father was addicted. Nothing could be more repulsive than his looks and manners when under its influence; and nothing could therefore be more calculated to warn us from the danger of falling into the same fatal snare. But the case was widely different with the evil passions, thoughts, and feelings, to which this vice, indulged by a parent, gave rise in the minds of his children; and even William, good and gentle as he was, and subdued as his meek spirit seemed to be by the influence of religion, was sometimes goaded into a sort of passionate despair, which I afterwards had reason to believe arose in part from a feverish and irritable state of bodily health.

To my father's delinquencies of conduct I had become so accustomed, as to hear his harsh words, and occasionally profane expressions, without that acuteness of feeling which they would have occasioned, had the awful change in his moral character been suddenly developed; but that William should do wrong, should think an unkind thought, or yield to an angry or unworthy impulse, was more than I could bear to think of; and the first time a conviction of this kind flashed across my mind, it was like the darkening of the sun in the heavens above me.

I have said that William was a boy of deep feelings. He had also thoughts and imaginations both vivid and mature beyond his age. He had read books unfitted for the mind of youth, and his whole moral and intellectual being had progressed to an extent bearing no proportion with his bodily powers. Thus there were times when he seemed to be absolutely

mastered by his feelings; and what was most astonishing to me, when these feelings were of a nature almost entirely opposed to what he, in his cooler moments, approved. The consequence was, that with a conscience sensitive like his, he was subject to seasons of depression, and fits of repentance, as intense as the emotions by which they were caused; nor was it to be wondered at, that, amidst the tumult of such a state of being, without a mother, and without a friend on earth to console or to advise him, his bodily constitution, always delicate and feeble, should sink beneath the load which so frequently weighed upon his mind.

But to return to my story of the dog, from whose companionship I had hoped that my brother would derive so much enjoyment. My father returned home one day so much intoxicated, that we should neither of us have remained in the room with him, but that he had begun to amuse himself in the usual way with the little playful animal, which, until really hurt, and that severely, seemed determined to take in good part all the peevish but provoking tricks he played upon it. Thus it often gambolled about his feet when he came in, and even licked his hands while in the act of tormenting it. This day, however, he tried a new experiment by holding it so near the fire, that its forefeet absolutely touched the bars. In vain the little creature looked at my father, and whined most piteously. In vain I pleaded, and my brother wept. The more we said, the more my father laughed, and persisted in his cruelty; yet to bear it in silence was impossible.

It was a moment of awful trial with William. I saw him growing pale as death. I watched the struggle of his feelings, not knowing what they were: I should have

thought he was either fainting or dying; but that his eye was fixed and bright like fire. At last he drew a pen-knife from his pocket, opened it quickly, and, flashing a wild look at my father, in another moment it was plunged into the heart of the dog.

But, oh! the fondness, the weakness that came upon him when this act, so terrible to us both, was done! It seemed as if he and his little favourite would have died together, and I became really afraid that his next effort would be one of violence against himself.

Nor was my brother's penitence less than his grief, for this strange wild act of frenzied feeling.

"I am glad," he used to say, "that the poor little thing is dead. I am satisfied, quite satisfied, to be alone. But, O Edith, if my mother could have seen me at that moment, she would have thought me a companion only fit for demons. It is a horrible thing to be the victim of passion, even in a righteous cause."

William said right. It had been a horrible thing to me to see him wrought upon as he was, in that cruel moment; and a long time elapsed before I could feel again the confidence I had once felt in his security against the influence of passions incident to our common nature, but which I seemed to dread less for myself than for him. It was melancholy too to witness the depths of distress into which the poor boy was plunged, by the conviction which his impetuous conduct left upon his mind, that he was capable of feelings so strongly opposed to what his mother would have sanctioned by her approval; and from this time his bodily frame began more evidently to sink under that insidious malady which had terminated the earthly trials of his beloved parent. This change in my brother's constitution, it was my mournful task to watch

in its gradual progress, until he became so decidedly an invalid, that, with the additional disadvantage of his lameness, he was dependent upon my care for the gratification of every wish, and upon my help for almost every movement.

In this state we were but little prepared for a new trial which awaited us. We had long been aware that my father's affairs rendered it desirable to curtail our expenses in every possible way, but now that crisis had arrived which reduced us to the necessity of seeking another, and an humbler home than that which was associated with all our recollections of a happy and cherished infancy.

It was perhaps well for my brother, and myself, that his bodily infirmities were such as to occupy us both on this melancholy occasion with contrivances for his comfort; which, having no one to share them with us, left but little time or thought for the loss of almost all that was still valuable to us in life—it was perhaps well that our garden, our flowers, our pleasant walks, and the trees beneath whose shade we had spent so many sunny hours, were necessarily forgotten for a time in the exertions we were compelled to make; nor was it until completely located in our new habitation, that we realized the extent of our privations, and the state of actual destitution to which we were reduced.

Anxious that my brother should feel the change as little as possible, I had his bed-room fitted up with every comfort and accommodation which our limited means afforded; and as his lameness prevented him from ascending to the little attic in which I slept, he never discovered that I had stripped my own apartment of every thing but the low bed, on which I often cried myself to

sleep, in order to enjoy the happiness of seeing his look more habitable, and more like the room he had occupied in our early home.

I have said it was well for me that active occupations left me little time for brooding over the sad realities of my situation ; and now the necessity of parting with our only servant threw the care of our little household entirely upon my hands. Even with this reduction, our means were insufficient for our absolute wants, and at an age when girls in general enjoy exemption from the pressing anxieties of life, I was plunged into a new world of responsibility and solicitude, which seldom left me a moment for the indulgence of selfish or personal sorrow.

Thus, in all probability, it was, that my spirits seldom failed me, for I cannot otherwise account for the manner in which I endured the trials of each day. It is true, I had one precious being still left to me to care for, and to love ; and while such is the case, the heart of woman seldom sinks. This precious one too, this beloved brother whose sufferings claimed my tenderest sympathy, seemed now to have passed as it were through a fiery ordeal, and to have given up his heart entirely to Him who alone could purify and render it fit for his presence in an eternity of happiness, so that that holy calm was diffused through his whole being, which is the surest foretaste of what the spirits of the blessed are permitted to experience in heaven.

At the time of my brother's darkness and distress, a season which we used to compare to his passage through the valley of the shadow of death, his prayers, though perhaps as frequent as now, had been only for forgiveness, and for preservation against the power of temptation. But

now they were like the outpourings of a spirit set free, and longing to draw others after it into the enjoyment of the glorious liberty of the gospel. I have listened sometimes to these earnest and affecting appeals, until I almost persuaded myself that his language was that of a purified being from a higher world, descending upon earth for a brief period, to witness and compassionate the sufferings of humanity, in order to represent them more feelingly before the throne of mercy.

On one occasion in particular, I remember having assisted my brother to rise at an early hour, on a bright summer's morning; and having left him during the time of his accustomed devotions, I strayed into an adjoining field, to gather him a handful of his favourite flowers. On returning to his bed-room, which was upon the ground floor, with a window to the east, through which the rays of the morning sun were streaming directly upon his head of light and shining hair, my steps were arrested for a moment by the perfect beauty of the picture which his form and countenance presented, as he remained, unconscious of my presence, in the attitude of prayer, the bible open before him on his lowly couch, and his hands and eyes upraised, while engaged in intercession for one, who, alas! was at that moment incapable of praying for himself.

More than usually affected by this scene, and by the affectionate fervour of my brother's appeals on behalf of a father who had of late years seldom addressed him except with harshness and contempt, my heart was so melted, that, kneeling down beside my brother, I threw my arms around his neck, and, pressing him closely to my side, attested by my tears how sincerely my feelings went along with his in their intensity, if not in their devotion.

In this solemn and blessed union of soul, we remained together for some time, until, startled by a sound which my brother did not hear, I ventured to turn my head towards the little casement, which looked out upon a small plot of ground constituting all the garden we could now call our own. The casement had been opened; and, half concealed amongst the ivy and the rose-leaves which grew in rich profusion there, I could distinguish the figure of my father. Indeed it cast a shadow far into the room, though William, still intent upon his spiritual exercise, did not perceive it; but I could discover at one glance that my father was returning in his usual state from some scene of nightly excess, and my fears were awakened on the instant, lest he should break in upon the solemnity of that sacred hour, by some burst of passion, which nothing appeared so invariably to excite, as what he called a pretence to be religious.

My first impulse was consequently to put a stop to my brother's prayers; but how could I do this, when that very father, that low and abandoned outcast, the source of his own and other's misery, was himself the burden of those sweet words, which flowed so softly from the lips of his neglected child.

"Let me never forget," was the language of the suppliant on this occasion, "that he is my father still. Keep me, O keep me from hard thoughts of him, to whom I owe the duty of a child. But, above all things, Heavenly Father, if it be thy gracious will, recall him from his wanderings. O make him see the beauty of thy righteous and holy law. Forsake him not in his desolation; turn not away from his despair. When I am in the grave, remember him with kindness and compassion;

for the sake of the wife who once loved him, and the children who once delighted to call him father."

Scarcely had these words escaped from my brother's lips, when a deep unearthly groan seemed to shake the very room in which we knelt. William would have started up, but for the lameness which prevented his moving suddenly, and before he could rise from his kneeling posture, my father was beside us, throwing himself with extended arms upon the bed, where he buried his face, and endeavoured to conceal his tears and his moans.

A long and passionate fit of weeping, partly the consequence of his bodily sensations, succeeded to this unwonted manifestation of feeling on my father's part; and scarcely could the actual appearance of an angel of light bringing tidings of peace from a better world, have been hailed by my brother and myself as a happier omen; more especially when my father, extending his hand, laid it gently on my brother's head, calling him, at the same time, his "poor injured boy."

"I am not poor," said William, anxious to do away with every cause for self-reproach in the mind of his parent—"I am not, injured. I have to thank this wounded limb for reminding me of my weakness and frailty; and I am rich, father—more than rich, in the belief that there is hope for you, and for me."

"No, not for me!" was the desponding reply of my father. "Your mother will welcome you to heaven, where the good and the happy rejoice together; but I shall never be there. I am lost beyond the power of redemption."

I had never before known my brother William so apt at reasoning as he proved himself that day. All the perverse and perverted means of convincing himself

without reason that there was no hope, which my father in his wretchedness and abasement brought forward, my brother was able to parry with a skill which sufficiently proved the enlightening power of religion in its practical influence upon the mind. I was myself surprised beyond all power of utterance; nor indeed was it necessary that any feeble testimony of mine should have been added to my brother's arguments.

Ignorant as we were of the world and its temptations, ignorant too of the nature of that vice to which my father had for some time wholly resigned himself, it was the fond persuasion of my brother's mind and mine, that, once convinced of his error, my father would return to the path of duty, and of peace. I knew not then, what indeed few persons seem to take into account, that a vast proportion of the victims to this degrading vice, are so unwillingly—at least, remain so, long after they have discovered that the shrine at which they sacrifice is the altar of a demon, whose cruelty is equal to his power.

Had the companionship of his children been all which my father sought at that time, it is possible that the better feeling he evinced on this occasion might have been strengthened into some lasting and efficient purpose; but no sooner did he return to his favourite places of resort, and joined his old associates, than he was assailed on every hand by those trials which have destroyed so many stronger resolutions than my poor father had the power to make. Even the good and the kind were in this instance opposed to his recovery; for while they sincerely desired his restoration to respectability, they pressed upon him the tempting draught, which when partaken of in moderation, they were not slow to commend. Thus the whole world was against him in its usages, and principles

of action, while the only weight to balance against this immense amount of influence, consisted in the kind and affectionate appeals of an ignorant boy and girl, whose observation of mankind extended little beyond the sphere of their own domestic circle.

What could we do? This serious and important question was pondered every day by William and myself, and as often we determined to behave to my father with every mark of respect and affection, and to allow nothing to remind him that we harboured any thoughts towards him but those of esteem and love. All would not do, however. We saw that we had failed. We detected an evil omen in his fits of restlessness and irritation; and before a month had passed away, he had so entirely resumed his former character, that to have addressed him with anything like freedom on that subject in particular, would have been to call forth the most frightful exhibitions of wrath and indignation.

In this manner, heavy days and lingering weeks passed on unmarked, except by an increase of distress and degradation; for we were now most pitifully poor, as well as wretched. It is true, that wealthy uncle already alluded to, who had provided for my sisters and my elder brother, allowed my father sufficient for the decent maintenance of himself and his family; but out of this allowance, so small a proportion was appropriated to household purposes, that William and I were often compelled to hide our hunger where we hid our tears, in the place of nightly rest, to which we retired at an early hour, for want of fire to keep us warm.

Of these privations, however, we never spoke, even to each other. Indeed, we felt them too keenly, to make them the subject of conversation; but especially it was

my bitter portion to feel them most acutely, for the sake of that dear sufferer on whom I should not have thought it too much to lavish the wealth of worlds.

It was now, for the first time, that I began to think of making money for myself, or rather for my brother, and plain needlework being the only resource that occurred to me, I had no sooner formed my plan, than with my usual impatience, I set about to act upon it, by making application to a benevolent and influential lady, whose residence was in our immediate neighbourhood.

On my way to this lady's house, I had to pass by the spot where I had first seen the little dog, of luckless memory ; and I determined to look in upon the family to which it had belonged, hoping that, as more than twelve months had passed since that time, I might find them in circumstances less distressed and destitute.

With this hope, I was looking about for the wretched hovel at the door of which I had seen the children at play, when, to my surprise, I discovered that scarcely one stone of that humble edifice was left upon another. The whole, in fact, had sunk into a heap of ruins, as unsightly as to me it was melancholy to behold.

"Do you know anything of a family of the name of Mason, who once lived here?" I inquired of a woman standing at a door hard by.

"Mason?" she repeated, evidently at a loss. "There are the Masons of Ashfield."

"Mason! is it Peggy Mason you want?" screamed a shrill voice from an attic window. "I can tell you all about those people. If you would speak to Peggy Mason now, you must curtsy to her, I fancy ; and say Ma'am. Why, Cuthbert Mason, who used to live here—the very same man that let his family go to wreck and ruin, is

now under-gardener at Squire Grant's, and lives in the lodge at the park-gate, like any gentleman. They tell me they are as proud as the squire himself, but I guess they would be a little shy of showing their airs amongst their old neighbours here!"

Not very solicitous to derive any further information from such a source, and knowing that I should have to pass the park-gate on my return home, I determined to ascertain, if it was possible to do so, for myself, what was the actual state of this family, and how so great a change in their circumstances had been brought about.

On approaching the lodge to which I had been directed, I saw what convinced me that some part at least of the statement I had heard was true; for, in the doorway of a neat and picturesque cottage, a family-group were assembled, the sound of whose voices was a sufficient evidence of the cheerfulness enjoyed by all. It was, in fact, the happy time of day—the time of the father's return to his evening meal—and in the joy of his heart he had caught up the youngest child, and was tossing it in the air with a gladness only equalled by its own.

"Is your name Mason?" I asked; forgetting, in the interest which this scene inspired, that I had no particular or sufficient plea for making such an inquiry.

"It is," replied the woman, evidently not ashamed of her name; and I then discovered that she was the same—the actual Peggy Mason—who in her wretchedness and humiliation had first awakened my compassion.

"I dare say you have no recollection of me?" I went on to say.

"Oh yes, Miss!" interrupted the woman, "I have good cause to remember you, and the day you took away our Johnny's dog."

By this time the former owner of the dog, a cheerful, rosy boy, had approached, and, with his eyes intently fixed upon my face, awaited my answer, as he ventured to question me about the playmate he had never been able to forget.

"You said you would use it well?" he said, more in the tone of a question than I was prepared for, and I felt the colour rising to my face, for shame and grief at the sad fate of that innocent and unoffending creature. Happily for me, however, the mother had a tale in readiness, which she was not slow to tell, for it was of hopes and joys—nay, even of actual possessions—to which she had for many years of her life been a total stranger.

"I suppose your husband has had a fortune left," I observed, by way of continuing a pleasant subject.

"Fortune, indeed!" exclaimed the woman; and she fixed upon her husband such a look of trusting love, as I could not translate into any definite or appropriate meaning.

"Fortune, indeed!" the wife continued, but this time it was with an expression of contempt, as if no fortune, as that word is usually understood, could possibly have made her so rich as she was.

"If then you have not had a fortune left," I said, "perhaps you will tell me by what blessed means this happy change has been brought about."

"It is all through the temperance society, saving only by the grace of God;" replied the woman.

"Impossible!" I exclaimed. "It cannot have been through anything so ridiculous as that."

"Ridiculous, or not, said the woman, "it has been the saving of me, and mine, and of hundreds besides.

And there sits a man who can tell, that but for the temperance society, he would have been sweeping the streets as a pauper at this very time, if indeed he had not been carried to the drunkard's grave."

"It's all true," said the man; "true as I sit here; and I don't care who knows it, for a man more nearly ruined than I was once, it would be difficult to find."

"But what could that society do for you?" I inquired. "I have heard it is the most foolish thing imaginable, got up by a set of people almost insane, and very low, and ignorant besides."

"Ignorant they may be on other points," replied Cuthbert Mason, "but they know how to treat the drunkard so as to cure him of his disgusting and ruinous habits, and that was enough for me."

"By cold water, I suppose they cured you," I replied with the utmost contempt; when the gardener turned suddenly towards me with a serious and penetrating look, at the same time inquiring if Mr. B. was not my father. —I felt my cheek again suffused with shame, as I answered, that he was; but having been so free in my own inquiries, it was only fair that I should be open to such questions in return.

"I don't ask," said the man out of impertinence or curiosity; and I hope I have not hurt you, Miss, by anything I have said; but I wish Mr. B—— and you too, were acquainted with the principles of this society, of which I must say, I was a little grieved to hear you speak so slightly as you did."

"And what good," I asked, "do you think these principles, as you call them, could possibly do my poor father or me?"

"Just this good," replied the man, placing the finger

of one hand upon the other with great earnestness:—‘The principle of total abstinence prevents a man *beginning*; and we all know that when once he has begun, no power on earth can make the intemperate stop.’

“That may be all true,” I observed, but what can be the use of getting up a society for such a purpose?”

“Why, to encourage the drunkard, to be sure,” said Cuthbert. “To make it a reputable and social kind of thing to abstain. All that is attractive and inviting has hitherto been thrown into the opposite scale; we want to render it as pleasant as we can for men to make this sacrifice, and therefore we meet like friends, and strengthen each other in the good cause.

“People who have never been tempted,” I observed, “as well as those who have?”

“Here lies the secret of our influence,” replied the man. “If none but the low, and the once nearly lost, were united in this society, there would be disgrace in the very name of it.”

“And don’t you think,” I asked, “that there *is* disgrace in the name of it? Don’t you think there *is* something to be ashamed of in joining such a society?”

“To the drunkard,” replied the man very gravely, “there is shame, and there ought to be shame, so long as he lives. There is shame in having broken God’s holy law, in having exposed his own folly to the world, and in having ruined the happiness of those who loved him best. Shame, I repeat, deep burning shame ought to be his portion in this world, and let him be satisfied to bear it. There is, however, a great difference in being ashamed of what has been a long time ago, and of what is now; and there is a still wider difference between shame by itself, and shame accompanied with

guilt. If at times I feel humbled and broken in spirit at the recollection of what I was, is it not a blessed thought that I am so no longer, and that although man may reproach me with my bad name, still there is hope that from the book of God's remembrance my bad deeds will be blotted out? Talk not then of the shame of joining a society for putting down vice. Can the shame of having been a drunkard, bear any comparison to the disgrace of being one still, or to the guilt of inducing others to become such?"

Having neither time nor inclination to enter more fully into the subject of temperance on the occasion when it was first brought before me in a practical manner, I walked on, intent upon the business which had called me out, yet pondering in my mind the reality of the change in the circumstances of this once wretched family; and such was the force of the impression I had received, that on seeing my father more rational than sometimes, I even ventured that evening to relate to him what I had seen and heard.

And severely was I punished for this act of imprudence, for no sooner had I spoken the words *Temperance Society*, than my father's fury burst all bounds, and he uttered against that society and all its members such tremendous imprecations, that I was glad to take the first opportunity of escaping from his presence, in order to shelter myself even from the sound of his voice.

The thought, however, still haunted me, that there was a strange mystery in all this—strange that the very system which had been instituted for the sole purpose of saving the intemperate from ruin, should be abhorred, and utterly rejected, by those whose welfare was the only end its supporters had in view.

Although the first impression made upon my mind by the facts which came to my knowledge in connection with temperance, was a deep and lasting one, there were many circumstances occurring in our family at the time, which tended materially to divert my thoughts from a subject in which I could not suppose I had any personal interest, and which I still continued to regard with the utmost contempt.

Amongst the most important of these, was the death of the wealthy uncle who had adopted my oldest brother and my sisters as his own children; enjoining upon them, as the only condition upon which they could receive the full measure of his favour, that they should separate themselves entirely from my father, and hold no familiar intercourse either with William or myself; and as this condition did not appear in any way difficult for them to comply with, we had necessarily become two separate families, as distinct in our feelings, views, and interests, as we were different in our habits and modes of living.

On the death of this uncle, my oldest brother entered at once into the possession of the greatest part of his property, in addition to the lucrative business by which it had been obtained; and as my father naturally looked to him for a more liberal maintenance than he had hitherto had any right to expect, I also indulged the cheering hope that the last days of William's life would be rendered more peaceful and happy to us all, by an additional supply of the comforts he had often longed for in vain. Not that my poor brother was impatient, or unreasonable—far from it. But, in connection with the exquisite sensibility which constituted so striking a feature in his character, was a quick perception of all which belongs to the most delicate taste, and the most intense feeling; nor

was it possible but that, situated as we were, his taste must often have been offended, and his feelings deeply pained, by what no skill or ingenuity of mine could soften or conceal.

It is easy, then, to imagine, what must have been my delight, on learning that my oldest and now wealthy brother proposed making his father more comfortable in his outward circumstances, provided only he himself was made acquainted with every debt, and indeed with his entire expenditure, and mode of living in every respect. To me, this plan appeared not only reasonable, but most of all to be desired; what then was my astonishment, to find the proud spirit of my father refuse to suffer what he called dictation from his son—refuse, in fact, to have his long-accumulated debts fully and honourably discharged; and, rather than sacrifice a single fraction of that imagined dignity, which in reality had long been lost, refuse to have his dying child supplied with the accustomed means of alleviating sickness and distress. In vain I reasoned with him, in vain I pleaded for my brother's sake. A spirit of perverseness seemed to have taken possession of his whole being, so that the best motives of others in relation to himself, were, by his diseased imagination, transformed into the very worst. Nor was this the case only at those times when he could scarcely be said to be himself. In moments when he was most sane, he was always most depressed, most morbid, and irritable in the greatest degree. Thus I had no means of appealing to his reason; for either he was elated, frivolous, and extravagant in the extreme, or he was the victim of imaginary injury, of suspicion, and despair.

Those who speak of the most irrational seasons in the history of intemperance, as the worst, have but little

actual knowledge of the malady itself. As the wreck left by the tempest, affords stronger evidence of the work of ruin, than the rage of the elements even in their loudest strife; so the wreck of the human mind, when its accustomed stimulus has ceased to operate, presents a more melancholy picture of moral and intellectual ruin, than even the wildest ravings of a heated and excited brain.

It was thus with my father. I could bear his senseless laugh, his unmeaning mirth—I could bear the burden of his presence in his most restless and extravagant moods, because I did not look upon him at such times as a responsible agent, and consequently asked of him neither sympathy nor companionship—but when we sat together through those long hours of listless despondency, or those hours of darker gloom, when his irritated passions worked him up to fresh thoughts and acts of desperation, it did feel hard to me, that I could not address him as a father and a friend; nor even consult him on apparently the most indifferent subject, without being liable to the most cruel misconstruction, accompanied often by frightful ebullitions of rage, either against me, or against those whose good name was dearer to me than my own.

Towards the close of my brother's life, his disease made rapid progress, and I saw, what my father could not or would not see, that each day was becoming precious as the last. Certain that my father would bitterly reproach himself afterwards, if he went on in his accustomed course until too late to listen to the dying admonitions of his child, I endeavoured, by every means in my power, to engage his attention to the actual state of things in his miserable home. All my endeavours, however, so far from producing the effect desired, only seemed to drive him more frequently away from the scene of my

distress; and instead of hiding himself, as one would have supposed a parent so situated might have done, from common observation, I knew that his haunts were amongst the profane and the dissolute, in places where he was sure to be a spectacle to those who regarded his folly as an amusement, his ruin as a jest.

"I shall not live through this day, Edith," said my brother one afternoon, on awaking from a deathlike sleep; "where is my father?"

This question was asked in a manner at once so hurried, and so anxious, that I saw the importance attached by the poor sufferer to the presence of his father; and despatching the only assistant I had in the house to the place where my father was most frequently to be found, I awaited the result with a solicitude scarcely equalled by that of him who was evidently desiring to offer up his last prayer in the hearing, at least, of a parent who could not be induced to pray for himself.

"Mr. B——," said the messenger on her return, "says he will not come home unless you go for him yourself."

"Go then, dearest Edith," said my brother; "nothing will harm you, and I *must* see my father. Go," he continued, seeing me still hesitate, "tell him I am dying, and that in another hour he may be too late!"

This was an appeal not to be resisted; for how could any personal consideration weigh with me at such a time? So, throwing on my cloak, it being then deep winter, and the night both cold and dark, and hurrying along through the streets and alleys of a busy town, I came at length to the open door of that low place of vulgar merriment, where I knew my father was to be found.

Had I paused a single moment at the entrance, it is more than probable my resolution would have failed me,

so utterly repulsive was every sight and sound I had to encounter there; but, occupied solely with the one idea of my brother's approaching death, I hurried into an inner apartment, where the first object I beheld, was my father, and the only words I uttered were an exclamation that my brother was dying, and that consequently he must come home without losing a single moment.

In the confused and frightful scene which ensued, I remember nothing distinctly, but laughter, and rude jesting, and that I, as a female, and consequently out of my proper place in that strange company, was the object of universal attention, and the subject of coarse jocularities. I remember, too, that my father took my part, leading me by the arm away from that place of horror; but, having seen me safely beyond its precincts, he stubbornly refused to accompany me one step farther, repeating what he had always said, that my brother was not so ill as he wanted us to suppose.

Nothing now remained for me, but to retrace my footsteps home, which I did with the utmost speed; though how to meet my brother's searching eye, after failing in the object he had most at heart, was a question of insurmountable difficulty. But, alas! that eye had closed upon every earthly object, before I met its glance again; and, on gently drawing aside the curtain of my brother's lowly bed, I saw that there was no longer need to prepare the sound of any word that might fall upon that now senseless ear.

So long had my own life been wrapped up in that of my brother, so long had my own happiness or misery been lost sight of in anxiety for him, that the first sensation I remember to have experienced, on finding that his gentle spirit was actually gone, was one of strange

and almost unnatural joy. It was, however, but the sensation of a moment. Happy had it been for me, could I have lengthened its duration. That moment passed, and then nature, in all her strength, asserted her dominion, and I sank upon the ground, struck down with a sense of my own loneliness.

But it is not upon my own sensations that I wish to dwell. Thousands of daughters, wives, and mothers, in this country, so famed for its happy homes, are now experiencing what I did then—how worse than lonely it is, to be excluded from all fellowship with the happy and the good, and to be shut in with that of evil in its lowest and most degraded form!—Mine was no singular or extraordinary case. I might have indulged in the idea of participation with many of my sex. I might have claimed an imaginary sympathy with sisters in suffering, but at the time of which I speak, no thought of alleviation presented itself to my dejected mind; and as no human voice was near me, to speak of pity or of kindness, I realized, to its full extent, the utmost depth of human destitution.

In this state of feeling, that long night was spent, the first silent and solitary night of my bereavement. I was alone in the house—alone with the dead—yet nothing like fear was mingled with my distress. How could I fear in the presence of that sweet image of loveliness and repose! And if at times a sense of the reality of spiritual things came over me with almost overwhelming awe, it was so softened by the natural association of that heavenly countenance, with the pure and sinless inhabitants of the angelic world, that when for a moment I imagined spiritual beings to be around me, it was only to derive from their ideal presence a sense of protection, security, and peace.

When the mind has been long and deeply absorbed by ideas of this kind, it is sometimes more startled by being suddenly brought back to the actual and present world, than it would be by the visible presence of some supernatural being; and it was so with me, that while I sat in my brother's room long after the hour of midnight, my eyes still fixed upon the extended form, and mechanically tracing out the folds of the white sheet which was spread over the bed, I started from my seat, and even uttered an exclamation of alarm, at the sound of a human footstep on the gravel-walk beside the window. There might possibly be something more than usually distinct in this sound, for I had just opened the window, and drawn the shutters to, in order to exclude the early beams of the morning sun; yet on endeavouring to collect my thoughts, I soon recollected that it was my father's habit to return home about this hour. So far, however, from this idea bringing with it any consolation, I withdrew immediately to an inner room, determined to wait there until my father should have retired, in order to prevent an interview such as I had every reason to anticipate taking place in the chamber of death.

Before closing the door after me, I discovered that the footsteps stopped exactly before the partly-opened window; and I could not help pausing to listen whether my father, on seeing a light in the room, might be tempted to look in. I could hear him fold back the shutter, and throw the window up, but I dared not look to see with what aspect of countenance he would glance towards that silent bed. For a long time the deepest silence prevailed, and then my father opened the door as usual, with his own private key, and walked directly into the room where the dead was laid. Again he paused, and all was

silent as before. I dared not interrupt the solemnity of that awful moment. As the parent bent over the lifeless form of his child, I could hear his deep breathings of agony, which gradually grew into long low moans. I could not speak to him, for I had no words of comfort to offer ; and I thought too that in solitary communion with his Maker, while the image of death and the thoughts of eternity were present with him, it was possible that his heart might be more melted, than by the more familiar intercourse of one who was living and feeling like himself. I therefore still concealed myself, and, falling upon my knees, implored the aid of the Holy Spirit to bring home to his soul a conviction of its actual state, and of the only ground of hope which yet remained for one so lost, and so abandoned.

Earnestly as my attention was engaged in these supplications, I could not fail to hear that a deep, and, to me, strange voice, in the adjoining room, was also pouring forth the words of prayer. It was my father who uttered this new language ; and it seemed to me at that moment, as if the gates of mercy, having opened to admit the pure spirit just set free from earthly bonds, a gleam of light from the Fountain of all goodness had darted through, and illuminated my humble home, which the very moment before had been the darkest and most barren spot of earth to me.

But the prayer of a wounded spirit grovelling in its wretchedness, without hope, is an awful thing ; and as I listened, the language of my father's lips resembled more the strong agony of nature in its last appeal, than the confiding submission of one who knows himself to be chastened by a Father's hand. There was evidently no softening, no sustaining influence imparted, nor indeed

was it asked. The language was that of bitter self-upbraiding, and of abject misery and despair. Still it was something, to retain this powerful consciousness of responsibility and guilt; and amidst my own desolation, it was still a cheering thought, that my father's heart was not yet entirely hardened, and consequently that his situation was not yet utterly destitute of hope.

It required, however, the most watchful care, and the strictest circumspection, not to appear to take advantage of his softened moods, in order to approach more familiarly his secret thoughts; and gladly as I would have alluded to the feelings of the past night, I was compelled to meet him in the morning with an aspect of indifference, not daring even to allude to the event of my brother's death.

"You are not going out to-day, father, are you?" I asked, seeing him prepare in his accustomed manner to leave the house.

"Why not?" was his hasty reply.

"Because," I answered, "there are many things to do, which I don't think I can well attend to alone, and besides I have no money."

It was an unfortunate and rash statement for me to make at that moment, for nothing irritated my father's temper more than any allusion to our scanty means, now that his oldest son was living so near us, in the enjoyment of affluence. Indeed, the simple fact of my brother being surrounded by luxury and abundance, supplied him with a sort of standing text, from which he could at any time harangue with all the bitterness of wounded and exasperated feeling. Even the parties my brother gave, the company he kept, and almost everything he did, were regarded as additional injuries of a directly personal

nature to the father whom he was said to have disowned ; and if his name appeared as the mover in any public or useful cause, my father was sure to come home after having seen it, charged with fresh invectives against the ostentation and hypocrisy of his son. More especially on the subject of intemperance, he always maintained, that as much evil was carried on at one of my brother's dinner-parties, as in those lower scenes to which he was more accustomed ; and that the man who could send home his guests in the state in which my father declared he had seen them leave his house, had no right to cast off his own parent for the vice of intemperance. Against facts and statements such as these, I could find nothing to say ; and I even began to think with my father, that the temperate part of the community, or rather those who extended their indulgences to the utmost limit of decorum, were neither just nor generous towards those who had been so unguarded as to advance only a little farther on the same dangerous course.

On one occasion, especially, I remember venturing so far as to tell my father what my brother had often said in my presence, that if he would resolutely abstain, and pledge himself to do so, from ever partaking even in the slightest degree of that which had effected his ruin, he would establish him in a comfortable home, and maintain him in respectability and plenty for the remainder of his life. Nothing could have appeared more fair, or indeed more kind, than this proposal ; but had it been to deprive my father of all means of enjoyment, he could not have received it in a more indignant spirit, than that with which he threw back from him a proposal calculated, in his opinion, to deprive him of an essential to existence, and therefore what no man ought to be required to give up.

“Let me see,” he replied, “that your brother can do without his wine. Let him pledge himself first, and then, I make you my solemn promise, I will follow his example.”

In the course of a subsequent conversation with my brother, for I was often compelled to appeal to him in my distress, I repeated to him what my father had said on this subject; when, turning to me with a most forbidding look, he asked me rather harshly, whether I had become imbued with the absurd notions of the temperance people, that I should propose to him such an act of folly and madness.

“Indeed, brother,” said I, “it is far from my thoughts to propose it. I only repeated the words of my poor father; and as to the temperance people, I know but little about them, nor do I wish to know more. Still I think if my father had made this proposal to me, I would have cheerfully complied with it. Indeed, it would have made little difference in my way of living; but with you I know the case would be more difficult.”

“Difficult!” exclaimed my brother, “it would be impossible. It is not the value of the wine. Every one who knows me, knows that I take no more than is absolutely necessary; but society—respectability—a man’s standing in the world—all these things must be thought of; and how could these be maintained if I were to invite guests to my table, and take no wine?”

“True,” I replied, “these things must be thought of.” And I remember that I fell into a long fit of musing after my brother had left the room; for I thought there was my father’s respectability and standing in the world, to be considered as well as other’s. His good name had been effectually lost, and his ruin completed, by the use

of such stimulants as wine. It was a strange enigma then, that the disuse of such things should subject any one to an equal loss of character. It was a strange enigma, that the winning back again to peace and comfort of such a man as my father, should not be made at least to bear some comparison with that conventional sort of respectability, which consists in mere conformity to the established usages of society. These considerations, I remember, perplexed and occupied my thoughts at the time, though they failed to bring the subject before me in its true light, and I went on as before, not knowing what to advise my father, even at those times when his temper was softened so as to admit of the subject of his besetting sin being candidly discussed.

In this manner time passed on, though heavily to me, for we fell deeper and deeper into distress; for while my father's debts and difficulties accumulated, my brother, wearied out with his perverseness, and very naturally shrinking from intercourse with one so lost and low, by degrees withdrew himself from all communication with us; my sisters both married to a distance; and of the few friends who had respected me for the sake of a family once respectable in itself, some being removed by marriage, and others by death, I was left alone to struggle with the hard circumstances of my lot, unaided and alone.

But of all the kinds of desertion I was doomed to experience, and they were many and severe, that of being separated from the society of the kind and the good, was the heaviest calamity to me. Being naturally social and communicative, there were times when I felt as if my heart would break under the burden of its unshared and solitary grief. At such times I had often sought for

sympathy and companionship, and sometimes I had been led fondly to believe that I had found what I sought, though the fact of my sharing the home of a father such as mine, eventually set me apart and at a distance from all those personal intimacies, which sustain the human mind, and particularly that of woman, under its deepest trials.

On one particular occasion, when more than usually depressed by the feeling, that of all earthly beings I seemed to be the one most effectually shut out from Christian fellowship, I turned my steps one cold winter's evening, towards a place of worship at some distance from my father's house, where I often went to join in prayer and praise with a people who were all strangers to me, and who were consequently unacquainted with my sufferings and my disgrace.

Before entering this place, I was struck by the unusual concourse of persons, whose attention appeared to be directed to the same point ; but caring little what others might be anticipating, I took my seat amongst the crowd, and almost immediately opposite the speaker, supposing him to be the same venerable man, whose affectionate appeals had often wrung from me those natural tears, which sorrow and unkindness had long ceased to call forth. I know not how it was, but the solemn aspect of this place, the gathered multitude, the reverential stillness, and then the first burst of vocal harmony, which ascended as it were from every heart, used to re-animate my drooping spirit, and fill my bosom with a kind of joy, which I would scarcely have exchanged for the happier lot of the privileged beings by whom I was surrounded. Never was the scene altogether more impressive to me than on this occasion ; and when I lifted up my eyes, so

entirely were my feelings occupied by the service for which that multitude had met, that it was some time before I perceived the place of the accustomed minister to be occupied by a younger man, and a stranger. At first this fact made no impression upon my mind, beyond a sudden sensation of regret, for I had learned to love that venerable man, whose gentle words of soothing and encouragement I often appropriated, though believing him at the time to be unconscious of the existence of such a being as myself; and having become accustomed to his voice and manner, having learned also to associate them with the least unhappy moments of my life, I was sorry to miss the endearing tones of the only voice in the whole world, which spoke to me with kindness and affection.

Soon, however, there thrilled across my soul, another voice, it is true, but one of such surpassing melody, that, tuned as my ear had ever been to the finest tones of music, I listened with riveted attention, more occupied with that mere sound, than with the still stronger and purer language of the speaker. Yet, by degrees, this language won upon me in a manner to which I had hitherto been a stranger, for it was an address calculated to call the thoughts away from self, and from all mere personal considerations, into a region of pure benevolence, in which love was the element, and the salvation of a guilty world the sole object of desire.

By the indifferent and the worldly-minded, the eloquent and animated speaker who delivered that address, would have been considered an enthusiast—perhaps a madman; and yet he was calm, and spoke of actual facts—facts of which he had himself been the witness in a far distant land, where all the elements which compose our social existence in this were unknown. He spoke like a man

who had known the world too, but at the same time like one who, having gone beyond the narrow bounds of its conventional requirements, had stretched his mental vision into other worlds, and seen and felt that there is a spiritual existence, in which the low thoughts and calculations which occupy so much of our attention here, will shrink into their proper insignificance, when contrasted with the things of eternity, in a region where all is purity and light.

He might have been an enthusiast—that pale and spiritual-looking man—for he had little of the aspect of one who struggles in the mart, or labours at the oar, to win the golden recompense of pecuniary success; he might have been an enthusiast, if a man must needs be such, to live for higher aims, and objects totally distinct from those which stimulate the efforts of the busy multitudes thronging our public streets; yet with all his holy zeal, and far-extending views, he was simple as a child; and he spoke of his low dwelling underneath the palm-tree's shade, the leaf-thatched cottage where he dwelt alone, with all the familiar accompaniments of this kind of unsophisticated life, in a manner at once calculated to amuse, and to touch the heart.

It requires, perhaps, some study of the human heart, as well as some practical experience of a situation similar to mine, to form even a remote conception of the manner in which these details, connected as they were with the highest and holiest aims to which human effort can be directed, struck upon my imagination at the time, and locked themselves in with the cherished secrets of my soul. I was naturally ambitious—here was a field for the exercise of every noble gift, whether natural or acquired. I was naturally energetic—here was an object worthy of my utmost endeavours. On the other hand,

there was my home! my father!—It was like looking forward into heaven, and backward into the depths of darkness. Was there no possibility that women could be useful there? Yes, I had heard of many who had gone out. But the speaker ceased. The moving congregation brought me back to my senses. I looked at the speaker again, as his hand was pressed upon his brow, and his head bent forward in the attitude of silent prayer, and then I turned away, to hide my wretchedness once more within my solitary home.

On passing through a sort of vestibule which led to the outer door, I was unexpectedly accosted by a kind Christian woman of great respectability, who was one of the very few not too scrupulous to invite me to her house, though I had never yet taken advantage of her hospitality, fearing I might meet with others less charitably disposed than herself.

“I am glad to see you here to-night,” said this lady. “Do come with me, will you? I am going to have a few friends to supper, to meet Mr. S., the gentleman we have just heard.”

Slight and casual as this invitation was, and evidently arising out of the excited generosity of the moment, I felt my heart glow, and my cheek burn, while I hesitated whether to accept it.

“Come,” said the lady, “I shall quite expect you;” and she flew off to other and more important guests.

It is scarcely necessary for me to say, the temptation was too strong for me to resist. I went to the lady’s house, and by some mismanagement, certainly not on my part, for I knew too well my proper place, I found myself seated immediately beside the speaker, to whose eloquence I had listened with such entranced emotion.

If his public address was calculated to excite and rivet the attention, his private and social conversation was to me, if possible, more pleasing. Playful, animated, and perfectly free from all affectation, he had the advantage of a fund of anecdote to draw upon, so perfectly novel and extraordinary to his hearers, that his own simple and familiar language was the very best medium through which these anecdotes could be conveyed; and amongst the company who met around the social board that night, I believe I was not the only one who would willingly have listened until morning.

Regard for the health and comfort of her guest, however, induced the lady of the house herself to give the first hint that it was time to separate; and I, of course, needed no second intimation that it was my place to retire.

"Have you far to go?" asked the gentleman with his natural frankness.

"Not very far," I replied.

"Do you go alone?" he asked again.

"Yes;" I replied, with some hesitation, feeling but too forcibly how this single fact might affect my respectability.

"Allow me to go with you?" he asked,

"Impossible!" I replied, "you who have exhausted your strength in our service! I could not think of it for a moment."

"You must allow me," he said again, "unless indeed you have some other companion; for to tell the real truth, I want an excuse for getting out into the air. These heated rooms and close assemblies are worse to me than a whole night in the open fields; and unless I have some more natural refreshment, I shall not sleep to-night."

It was perfectly reasonable, that the company, ignorant of the actual state of the case, should protest against my accepting the services of so distinguished a guest; and I had that night more offers of friendly escort, than I had ever been favoured with in my whole life before. Still, however, the gentleman persisted in accompanying me, and we were soon walking together beneath a starry sky, and conversing with all the familiarity of friends who had known each other for years.

On reaching the door of my humble home, I remember to have felt a thrill of shame at the aspect of that and the neighbouring habitations. By their appearance it is probable my companion was not the least affected, for he turned to me and said, with the utmost cordiality, "Had the hour not been so late, I should have asked you to introduce me to your family. To-morrow, if you please, I will call again; at what hour shall I be most likely to find you at home?"

It may easily be supposed into what a state of confusion I was thrown by this proposal, the temptation on the one hand to prolong the acquaintance, and the dread on the other of disclosing the secrets of my degraded situation, rendering me almost speechless at the moment; yet, I believe, I did utter something about being always at home, and with a friendly good-night we parted.

It is enough to add, in connection with this circumstance, that it led to an intimacy which formed one of the most important events of my whole life—important as it affected my own feelings, and the trial of my principles, which until that period of my experience could scarcely have been said to be established upon any certain foundation.

How little is sometimes known, even by our most

intimate companions, of the trials we are called to endure, and the struggles we have to sustain in passing through the journey of life! The opportunity which at this time occurred to me of escaping from all the painful and humiliating associations of my father's home, and of entering at once upon a career of usefulness and respectability, was regarded by my Christian friends as nothing less than a providential opening for my safety here and hereafter; while to me it appeared at times, if possible, even more than this. Yes, it was more to the natural heart of woman, for as our intimacy grew, I learned to love, as well as to admire that unsophisticated and spiritual being, who, of all the great family of mankind, was the only one not ashamed to acknowledge both sympathy and identity with me. He was alone too. His health of mind and body were impaired, he needed a kind caretaker, and he asked me to leave behind me all that was repulsive and degrading to the soul of woman, and to share with him, and for his sake, all that I was most calculated by nature and by circumstances to regard as desirable.

How could I resist? In truth, I know not how I did resist; for when I look into myself, there seems no sufficient strength for such an effort; yet, something struck upon my heart at the time, like a conviction, that a daughter, situated as I was, ought not to desert her father; and the thought that he had, and could have, no other friend on earth, so long as his present habits were retained, rendered it with me an almost imperative duty to remain with him.

"You speak of your father being alone," said my friend one day, as we conversed on the subject together for the last time; "but whom have I? I was an orphan

when I went abroad. It was morally impossible that I should associate myself with the sort of people by whom I was surrounded ; and now on returning to my native country, it is to visit the grave of my only sister. Can any one be more alone than I am at this moment ?”

“ It is true,” I replied—and my tears attested how deeply I felt what he had said—“ it is true, you are alone now ; but in your case a world of sympathy awaits you. On every hand you have friends and admirers, from whom it can be no difficult matter to select a kind and noble-hearted woman, more fitted than myself to be the companion of your life. Compare your situation with that of my poor father, and ask who will ever look in upon his solitude, if his daughter should forsake him ? Besides which, he may not always be thus. Already there have been moments in his wretched life when his nature has been softened, and gleams of repentance have given me a transient and blessed hope. Such moments may occur again, perhaps on his death-bed. And where, I ask myself every day, if I should leave him, where will he die ? It may be as a common outcast on the public road, in a workhouse, or an asylum. No ; for myself, I am inured to suffering, and therefore I shall not sink beneath this trial. For you, I see a bright future opening, with a companion more worthy of your choice ; but for my father, there remains nothing, unless the child he nursed so fondly in her infancy, will watch over his grey hairs, that they may not go down dishonoured to the grave.”

“ Edith,” said my friend, and I never shall forget his words, “ it is because you are such a daughter, that I would have chosen you before every other woman to be my wife, even before I knew you well enough to love

you. If I now believed you to be really essential to your father's happiness or good, I would not say another word by way of inducing you to leave him. But if all I hear be true, if he makes you but a poor return for this sacrifice of a lifetime, if he even treats you, as I suspect and fear, with harshness and injustice, I would ask you, and I must do so once more, to go with me, and to share a home where unkindness shall never come. You know my situation, you know my humble means; but you do not know the tenderness of the heart I offer you; nor how, with more than a parent's love, I would shield you from harm and danger. If I left you happy and honoured as you ought to be, I feel that I could bear it; but here your energies are contracted, your feelings withered, and your whole being—"

"Say no more!" I exclaimed, "I know it all too well. You can name no item in the long catalogue of human misery, with which I am not acquainted."

"And still," he said, "you refuse to share with me a happier, and a holier destiny?"

"I was my father's favourite child," I answered, for I had nothing else to say; and after that, we had a long and solemn leave-taking, and thus parted for ever.

I thought that night—it was but natural to think so—that my father might have been kinder to me than usual; but instead of this, he was more than commonly harsh and unfeeling, reproaching me on one occasion in which I had omitted a trifling affair of personal comfort, with being too much absorbed in my own thoughts and feelings, to remember him as a child ought to think of a father.

I have already observed how little we really know of each other's trials, or each other's motives. About the

time when I appeared likely to be removed to a more honourable, though a distant home, I found to my surprise that I had many friends, of whose esteem I had until then not received the slightest intimation; and as with one voice they all urged upon me the change which I needed no encouragement from them to make, their astonishment was only equalled by their indignation, when they found I had decided upon remaining with my father. Unable to understand my motives for acting in so unexpected a manner, they consequently scrupled not to suspect, and even to insinuate, that I was not, in my own feelings, sufficiently alive to the culpability of my father's conduct. It was certainly quite natural that they should think so. Under similar circumstances, I should probably have thought the same; but I confess it felt hard to suffer what I had done, and then to be charged with not feeling to a sufficient extent the great calamity of life.

These circumstances, and the fact of my continuing to associate myself with such a father, gradually separated me again from companionship with others; and I sunk in my own estimation, and in that of the few who had once looked favourably upon me, down to a lower grade than I had ever occupied before.

In this manner months and years passed on; for we must reckon the sufferings produced by intemperance, too often by the whole period of a lifetime. In this manner, then, years passed on, without hope, and without consolation.

The only change which marked this long lapse of time, was in my brother's family. He married a lady said to be endowed with every excellence of head and heart; and though to me she remained a stranger, I heard her

praises on every hand, but particularly amongst the poor in our neighbourhood. Once, indeed, it so happened that I met with her personally, though she knew not who I was; I only learned after she was gone, that I had been conversing with my brother's wife. It was in the cottage of the Masons, where I still continued to go sometimes to talk about intemperance—a subject on which my eyes were beginning to open—and I was not sorry to find there an intelligent-looking lady, evidently much interested in the same cause.

“I have signed the pledge,” said this lady, with the utmost cheerfulness and good humour, “not that it made any difference to me, because I have long been an abstainer; but because I could not feel happy to see the poor around me giving up this indulgence, without joining with them in their privations; and the satisfaction I have since experienced, would have abundantly rewarded me, had the privation been as great to me as to them.”

“But in the society you mix with,” I observed, “I should have thought this would have been impossible.”

“It is never impossible to do right,” replied the lady very gravely. “We charge God with injustice when we say we see a thing to be our duty, and deny that we can do it. It is so easy in this case too, when once done, that I cannot help wondering any kindly disposed person should hesitate, seeing the encouragement that is needed on every hand to induce the weak and the tempted to make the experiment for themselves.”

“But the customs of society,” I began again.

“Ah! there lies the grand error,” replied the lady, “we bring the customs of society into comparison with

Christian duty, and thus make shipwreck of our best endeavours. Where do we find it laid down as a divine law, that the customs of society shall be our rule of life? Nowhere I believe; but we do find it clearly enjoined in the Holy Scriptures, that we shall love our neighbours as ourselves; and how can we do this, without seeking to promote their temporal and eternal good, even when at the expense of some trifling interruption of our own comfort or convenience."

During this conversation, which was prolonged to some length, the woman of the house appeared to be listening attentively; and when we ceased to speak, she said, with an expressive shake of the head, "All this is very well, and highly commendable it is of you, ma'am, to set such an example; but, oh! if you could persuade Mr. B— to join you, what a blessing that would be!"

A slight blush diffused itself over the countenance of the lady as she prepared to reply—a blush which evidently denoted that she had thought and felt more on this subject than perhaps she liked to confess. "It would indeed be a blessing," she answered in a somewhat sad and subdued voice, and stooping down to one of the children, indicated by her manner that the conversation had gone far enough in that particular strain.

From the day on which this interview took place, I saw nothing of this excellent lady for some months, when, to my unspeakable surprise, I received a note with her signature, requesting me to call upon her at a certain hour on the following morning.

Carefully as I had hitherto abstained from claiming from my brother, ever since his marriage, so much as the common consideration of a sister, it was naturally a formidable affair to me to have to present myself in my

own proper character, to a relative who must necessarily feel the utmost repugnance to any intercourse with me as such. I consequently entered the house with such a sinking of the heart, as we only feel when about to encounter anticipated insult and contempt. How completely then were my anticipations dispelled, and my heart set at rest, by the manner of my new sister, for such indeed she proved, as she entered the apartment into which I had been ushered. She even called me by my name, and, holding out her hand, received me altogether with the cordiality of a friend and an equal.

My delight, however, was not equal to what it would have been, had I felt sure that she knew exactly who I was; and dreading to betray what might still be an unknown and unwelcome truth, I received this kind greeting in a manner at once embarrassed and cold.

“Do you not know me?” asked the lady, evidently repelled by my backwardness to meet her kindness. “Do you not know that I am your brother’s wife?—your sister? if you will henceforth call me so?”

I looked into her face. There was all the reality of truth in her clear bright eyes. Yet how could words of such blessed meaning have fallen upon my ear?—words spoken in such kind and gentle tones, that they seemed to me the language of another world. It was altogether like a dream; for there I stood, surrounded by all the elegancies of a wealthy house, the white hand of that fair lady still affectionately clasping mine—there I stood, the poor outcast whom nobody acknowledged when they passed me by! I could not believe the evidence of my own senses. The long dark night of my existence had blinded my weak eyes to such a glowing and delightful vision; and, sinking half insensible upon the floor, I

buried my face upon a couch, while a flood of tears, the sweetest I had ever shed, relieved the oppression of my overburdened heart.

"You must not weep in this manner," said the lady, kindly endeavouring to raise me from this humble posture. "I want you to consider me, not only as your sister, but your friend. It is a fact," she continued, "though one which you will perhaps be slow to believe, that I never was aware of your existence until the past week. Your brother, with mistaken kindness, kept from me all the trying circumstances of his family, until they came to my knowledge by the merest chance; and now if there be anything I have to reproach him with, it is that he has by this well-intended deception, been the means of depriving me of the power of doing my duty as I ought."

"Oh, Madam!" I exclaimed, "but my poor father!"

"Yes. He has told me all," she continued; "he has told me that he has a father in fallen circumstances."

"And is that all?" I asked.

"Is there anything worse to tell?" inquired the lady, evidently alarmed.

"Has my brother told you nothing more," I asked, "than that my father is poor?"

"Nothing," replied the lady, "unless he added 'improvident,' but of this I am not sure."

I felt my heart sink within me, but the time was come for a full disclosure; and I saw that the lady was herself sufficiently noble-hearted to bear it.

"It is right that you should know all," I continued; "and, cost me what it will, I must tell you: My father is the victim of intemperance!"

As I uttered these words, the gentle arm which had clasped my neck, fell as if it had been lifeless from my shoulder. I looked round. The lady was deadly pale, her lips compressed, and her brows knit together as if with a kind of inward pang. I felt that I had touched a cord of agony—a nerve perhaps already thrilling with sensation too intense.

“Has your father always been thus?” she asked eagerly.

“Oh, no!” I replied; “he was once the kindest of fathers—the most interesting of men.”

“And at what age,” continued the lady, “did his character begin to deteriorate?”

“He might be thirty, or more,” I answered. “All that I can distinctly recollect of the happiness of my childhood, is associated with him as a man of intelligence, a kind father, and a gentleman in every respect.”

These words appeared to fall upon an ear more than commonly sensitive to their sad purport. I saw that the heart of the kind lady was deeply moved—more so, it was evident, than could be accounted for by the circumstances of one, who, though connected with her family, was an entire stranger to her. The more I regarded the expression of her countenance, and the emotion indicated by her manner, the more I felt convinced that all was not peace beneath that fair exterior; and that the elegances of her home, and the polished aspect of the circle she was so well calculated to adorn, concealed in her case, as in that of too many others, the writhings of a wounded spirit, under sufferings unknown to the world.

“You must leave me to-day,” said the lady, suddenly turning round with that peculiar expression of look and tone, indicative at once both of smiles and of tears—

“you must leave me, dear Edith, to day. I will send for you again, when I feel stronger, and more mistress of myself.”

In the mean time my mind was tossed by a thousand anxieties on behalf of one whom it was impossible not to love, both for her own sake, and for the generous and noble-hearted manner in which she had bestowed upon me the blessing for which I had so long pined in vain—that of feeling I had a friend; nor, amongst these anxieties, was it entirely absent from my secret thoughts, that perhaps my brother might be falling into the same fatal snare which had been the ruin of his father. These frightful suspicions, however, I never uttered—indeed, to whom could I have uttered them, except to the being whose exultation on such an occasion, would have been too much to bear? That my father would really have exulted, I had no reason to doubt; for, more than once, my feelings had been put to the severest torture by symptoms of this nature; and as it had been the study of my early life to shield from his observation all the little failings of a comparatively pure and innocent being; so now, my ingenuity was often put to the test, to conceal from his knowledge those facts in connection with my only remaining brother, to which the world attached but little blame, but which I knew too well were calculated to call forth the animadversions of jealousy and suspicion.

I was anxious, too—more anxious than words can describe—as to the result of the information I had communicated to my brother's wife. It is one thing to imagine guilt and misery: it is another, to be brought into immediate contact with it. It is one thing, to think of human degradation at a distance, or amongst the

many : it is another, to have it brought before us in the person of a relative ; and much as long habit and the natural yearning of a child towards a parent, might have tended to reconcile me to my father's general manners and appearance, I could not contemplate him for a moment, even in idea, with the eyes of this delicate and exalted being, without seeing that repulsion was stamped upon every feature. Alas ! that a father should come to this ! that the earnest gaze of affection, which seeks forever the countenance of the beloved one, therein to read the workings of a nature with which its own is identified, should be withered or scared away by the hideous and frightful ruin of what was originally created after a model, not only noble, but divine !

Yet so it was ; and my poor father had become an object upon which affection could not look—an object from which the nurse drew back the infant that would have sported in his path—an object which the kind and the good paused not, even to pity, as they passed him by. How could I hope that such an one would ever be admitted to the tender mercies of my newly-found friend, or how could I desire it ?

Indeed, such was my dread of my father presuming upon the favour I had lately found in that quarter, that I dared not even make him acquainted with my sister's kindness ; and thus, instead of deriving any adequate satisfaction from her generous conduct, I was only possessed the more painfully with apprehensions as to the result of our interview ; more especially, as I now saw plainly, that if I should ever cross her path in company with my father, it must lead to a recognition, and consequent exposure, which above all things it was my wish to avoid.

I have spoken frequently of my poor father's perverseness, and I believe it to be an almost invariable accompaniment of habits such as his, that the individual, lost to shame himself, has a strange pleasure in exposing others to humiliation. Thus it was often his wish to make me the companion of his sauntering walks, on occasions when we were likely to be met by those, whose glance I would most gladly have avoided. If I refused to go, my father was liable to revenge himself upon me by directing his steps to his more familiar haunts; and if I went, he would too frequently select a path frequented by the more respectable part of the community.

"Why," he would ask, impatiently, "may I not walk upon a public path as well as others? Why may I not rest here upon these seats, placed purposely for the accommodation of the weak and the weary? If you are ashamed of being seen with me, you can return home. England is a free country, and owns no law for compelling a daughter to accompany an aged father."

It was in vain on such occasions that I pointed out the greater beauty, and the more desirable retirement, of the green fields. It was my father's pleasure to loiter along a public promenade at the outskirts of the town, and thither we must go.

For myself, even when alone, this was the last place I should have chosen, though it is quite possible that with the care and the economy I had been accustomed to practise, my attire might have passed unnoticed, as not differing materially from the costumes generally met with there. The dress of a female too, may be extremely simple, and composed of the cheapest materials, without always betraying an absence of gentility.

But with a man the case is widely different. The threadbare coat, the loose cravat, and the hat whose outline has lost its original and decent character, are marks of degradation which every eye can detect in an instant, and which decide the often-disputed point of respectability beyond even the shadow of a doubt.

Beyond all this, my father's countenance—but I will not speak of that. It had once been handsome, and intelligent; and more than all, it had smiled upon me in my childhood. So I used to think of these things, and all I could remember of him in my early life, and thus nerve myself for the trial of walking abroad with him wherever he might choose to go. Besides which, I could not fall lower than I was. I had no friends to lose, nothing to sacrifice, and consequently no event to fear.

Built up in the strength of this philosophy, I was walking with him one day along the promenade already described, which consisted of a broad gravel-walk, along the outskirts of what had once been a park, and which still retained that name, where the branches of overhanging trees afforded a welcome shade to those who chose to retire from the glare of the noonday sun; when, far in the distance, my ever-watchful eye detected the figure of my brother's wife, accompanied, as I first thought, by another lady, but whom I afterwards discovered to be a nurse, directing the steps of a child, whose gambols the mother appeared to be watching with delight.

My first impulse was a very natural one, to draw my father away from the spot before they should have time to approach, for they were advancing directly towards us; and I did just venture to propose that we should return

home; but recollecting that the more earnest I might seem in carrying my own point, the more my father would be likely to oppose it, I awaited the event with a sort of nervous apprehension, more easily imagined than described.

‘Edith,’ said my father, “do you know that figure in the distance?”

“I believe,” I replied, “it is my brother’s wife, accompanied by her nurse and child.”

“Yes,” my father continued, “that child who has been taught to despise its father’s parent. And there she sweeps along, that proud woman, like any queen, as if the ground on which we walk was not good enough for her delicate foot.”

“Father,” I said with some earnestness, “you mistake the feelings and character of that excellent lady. Nothing can be more unlikely than that her child should be taught to despise you.”

“You shall see,” replied my father, with that bitter smile which marked some of the darkest moments of his life. “You shall see,” he repeated; and placing himself more firmly on his seat, he awaited the approach of the nurse and child, who, considerably in advance of the mother, had left her conversing with a party of ladies, while they sauntered along the path, sometimes gathering daisies from the grass, and sometimes resting on a bench that stood by the way.

It was a lovely child, at that sweet age when the eyes first beam with intelligence, and when attracted, like the butterfly by sweets, the mind begins to search for a deeper interest in what at first delighted only the senses by its brilliant colouring, or its novel form.

It was a beautiful child, and looked up with one of those cherub smiles which awake the kindly feelings of humanity, even when they have been long dormant in the wounded breast. My father had placed his walking-stick halfway across the path, and as the child drew near, it laid its rosy fingers on the stick, and looked with its smiling countenance into my father's face.

"Do you know me, my little girl?" said my father, evidently won by the sweet expression of the child.

"Say, no;" replied the nurse, snatching away her precious charge; "We don't know any naughty old men, do we?"

My father's brow fell; his eye flashed with indignation; and in a moment his stick was raised, as if he would have struck both nurse and child to the ground.

"There!" he exclaimed, rising hastily from the seat, "I told you how it was. You have heard for yourself how they teach that little urchin to despise her father's parent."

All the arguments I could now use to convince my father that such was really not the case, and that what he had just witnessed was solely attributable to the folly of an ignorant nurse, fell upon an ear more than commonly closed against conviction; and, heated and exasperated as if the insult had been a direct and intentional one on the part of my brother and his wife, he hurried on, until I was compelled to leave him to pursue that too often frequented path which led to the chosen scene of his accustomed excesses.

It was not long after this, when my father and I happening to sit down one day to an unusually scanty dinner, and when I could not refrain from expressing my sorrow that I had not more to set before him, that I observed a

peculiar expression in his face which made me look again and again without being able to decide upon its meaning.

“Edith,” said he at last, being evidently aware of my curiosity, “I have lately learned a piece of news, which it concerns you to be acquainted with. Know then that your brother—your wealthy and reputable brother—who lives in his grand house, and lords it over the poor, and takes the lead in public business—your brother, who compels his own father to endure poverty and starvation—he himself has fallen, or is falling, into the gulf where I have perished.”

“What can you mean?” I asked, for I still clung to a faint hope that my secret fears might be unfounded.

My father replied by expressing himself in the strongest terms he could use, to explain that my brother was rapidly becoming as intemperate as himself. “But mind me,” he continued, “all in a quiet way, just under the cloak of hospitality, or the plea of keeping a good table, and all that sort of thing, which renders the vice itself almost respectable, so long as a man is rich, and stands well with the world; while I, Edith, because I am poor, and wear a threadbare coat, must rise up hungry from my table, and wander about an outcast from the society which welcomes him into its very bosom. Oh, shame upon the usages of that society, that we should first be tempted by its cruel kindness to fall into this fatal snare, and then left to die in shame and destitution, because we unconsciously fell one step too low!”

It was but too true as my father had said, though possibly the story of my brother’s shame might have received some addition from the colouring of his own distorted mind; yet of its truth as to the main points I could not doubt, for on the following morning, I was

again sent for by my sister, and this time our interview took place in her own chamber, my brother being absent on a journey.

It needed but one observant glance at the face and figure of my sister, to see that deep and painful experience had been her portion since we last met, and I asked, perhaps too abruptly, if she had not been ill.

"Ill in mind;" was her sorrowful reply — "so ill that I want a friend to whom I can speak freely of the nature and cause of my malady. Will you be that friend to me?"

I answered that I gladly would, and could imagine no gratification greater than that of being of some service to one whom I esteemed so highly.

"Enough of that;" said my sister. "I confide in your sincerity, or I should not have sent for you on the present occasion, although, independently of the kind feeling I trust you already entertain for me, you are in reality the only person whom I can or ought to make my confidant in the distress which preys upon my life. Know then, that I am a wretched—wretched woman!"

On uttering these words, my sister burst into an agony of tears, and actually wrung her hands, as if the restraint she had accustomed herself to practise in society being once removed, the acuteness of her sufferings was such as to set at defiance all concealment.

"Yes;" she continued, "I am indeed a wretched woman—here, at the head of my household, the loved and honoured mother of three sweet children, surrounded by all in which the heart delights, or which the eye is gratified to behold, with wealth at my command, and influence more than I can use, for the benefit of others or myself, I am the most pitiful and helpless being you can

conceive — pitiful, because my burden is greater than I can bear—helpless, because I know of no earthly means by which it can be removed. Your poor brother—must I speak his shame?”

“Spare yourself and me ;” I replied hastily. “I know it all.”

My sister turned upon me a keen and scrutinizing glance. “Is it then so generally known?” she asked eagerly.

“My father was my informant,” I replied : “From whence he obtained his information I am unable to say.”

“No matter!” my sister continued, with an air of despondency, as she walked hastily up and down the room, as if unable to rest. “It is no matter. Human pride might dictate that it should be published as little as possible ; but the sin would be the same, and the sorrow too.”

“My brother,” I replied, “was yet young. He had ever been open to conviction, and I ventured in addition to ask, whether she had tried that unbounded influence which all believed her to exercise over him, on this particular point.

“Tried it?” she exclaimed. “How otherwise could I sleep upon my pillow ; for what is love, if unaccompanied by solicitude for the good of its object ? Edith, believe me, I have reasoned with him, pleaded—prayed with him. Here, in this very chamber, we have bent our knees together, seeking help from Heaven to enable him to keep his resolution to refrain from excess. I thought for a long time his heart was steeled against conviction, for he smiled and put me off whenever I brought the subject before him ; and perhaps I was myself a little too late in endeavouring to awake his sus-

picious of himself. Of late, however, the case has become too obvious to admit of concealment, or of doubt; and he bears patiently my remonstrances, but what to do we neither of us know."

"I am astonished," I replied, "that so kind a husband as my brother, should not be moved by the remonstrances of such a wife."

"Do not mistake me," interrupted my sister, "your brother is moved, and often moved to tears."

"And does that emotion," I asked, "produce no effect?"

"Not," replied my sister, "when he is again surrounded by the temptations presented by society. Nay, rather, when he has gone forth the strongest in his good resolutions, I think he has come home the worst."

"There is a society, I believe," said I, "composed of persons who pledge themselves not to taste of anything which can intoxicate."

"Ah! there—," said my sister, with hands eagerly clasped, and with eyes upraised, "there is my only hope, if, indeed, I may speak of hope at all. Yet when I think of the class of individuals who compose this society—the poor, the illiterate, and the once depraved, I confess my heart faints within me; for how is your brother to be prevailed upon to associate himself with such? Already, however, he sees the working of the principles of this society amongst the people he employs. I can tell that towards those amongst his men who have become members, his eye is turned with close and watchful attention; and if he finds them consistent, firm, and true, with unabated health and strength, there is no knowing what may be the consequence."

In these thoughts, which evidently began to assume the character of hopes, I could not help thinking my sister too sanguine; for such was my idea of the society altogether, that I felt sure no reasonable man, and more especially no gentleman, would lend his countenance to the absurdities of which I had heard its members accused. Still I should have been sorry to throw a shadow over the faint light which this view of the subject afforded to one so much in need of consolation as my sister; and therefore I listened attentively, and with deep interest, to the explanation she gave me, of the entire system of self-denial for the sake of others, upon which this association depended.

“I have seen,” she continued—“nay, rather, I have felt in my own experience, how entirely inadequate are every other means than a rule of total abstinence to produce the effect desired. Since the first year of my married life, I have watched this growing evil, and though everything has been done which care and tenderness could suggest, not a single wave has been stayed in this ocean of bitterness. No, Edith, I see the dark sentence of his miserable doom written in characters too legible upon the face of him I love. I hear it in his step; I feel it in his fondest caress. There is no other way, and this is beyond the power of human strength to render applicable to his case.”

With these, and other expressions of a like desponding nature, we parted; for my hopes were faint, and my sister's, though sufficient now and then to afford a ray of comfort, sunk ever and anon to a deeper despair than she had known before.

What could we do? The force of prejudice, of habit, and of inclination, were against us; and of any one of

these three operating causes, one had been enough. What could we do? Nothing but weep, and pray, and wait with patience for the end.

In this manner weeks and months passed over, while vague rumours of my brother's actual state began to spread on every hand. It was not possible that his servants and workpeople should respect him as they had done; and one old man, who had been long a steady and faithful labourer in the business, had the boldness to mention the subject to him, and to advise him, as a friend, to make the same experiment which he and many of his fellow-workmen were making with such satisfactorily results.

It is scarcely necessary to say, that my brother's indignation was roused by this act of what he called 'unpardonable interference;' but though he threatened to dismiss the old man immediately from his service, he knew too well what belonged to his own interest, not to encourage the adoption of similar sentiments to his, amongst the people he employed.

While our family affairs remained in this unsatisfactory state, the principles of total abstinence were gaining ground, and working their way to countenance and respect on every hand. Frequent meetings of the society were held in the neighbourhood, from which some returned home to scoff, and some to adopt the new system of existing without what had previously been looked upon as one of the necessities of life. My father, of course, stood aloof from these associations, and I too believed, that, low as I was in the scale of respectability, I should fall still lower, by associating myself with persons of this class, although I had long been a scrupulous adherent to their peculiar rule of life.

Such being our sentiments, it may possibly be imagined with what astonishment I heard my father one evening express his intention of being present at a temperance meeting, which it was understood my brother would attend, by way of giving his sanction and encouragement to a means of moral and physical improvement, which had already worked so wonderful a reformation amongst the people for whose interests he considered himself deeply responsible.

What my father could mean by forming this resolution, I was for some time at a loss to imagine, for there was a strange triumph in his look and manner, which I could not understand, and which in its peculiar expression, was far indeed from offering me a ray of hope that his purpose was such as even his own conscience could approve. Soon enough, however, came the knowledge of what this purpose was, for, on entering the house a short time before the hour at which the meeting was convened, my father again avowed his intention of being there, adding, with the same look of exultation I had before observed—"The time has now come when your brother shall be exposed before the world. I have long suspected him of being no better than myself, but now I know it. I will therefore go to this meeting which he intends to sanction by his presence; and while he is urging on his poor workmen to give up their only indulgence, I will stand up and tell them what a hypocrite their master is."

That my father was capable of doing this, I could not doubt. That he was reckless enough to do it, I knew too well. Still I attempted to reason with him, and to plead, for the sake of humanity, and even of decency, that he would refrain from so gross an outrage

upon common feeling. All was in vain. I might as well have attempted to stem the waves of the ocean in their fury, or to turn away the tiger from its prey. Thus the dreaded hour arrived; and I saw my father go forth with this malignant purpose; while, unable to support my feelings under the uncertainty in which I must remain, I hastened after him to the anticipated scene of his most unnatural triumph.

The place of meeting was occupied by a strange and motley crowd, amongst which were thinly scattered here and there a few individuals slightly distinguished from the working class. For the most part, however, the assembly there met was composed of labourers and artisans, and of women and children, whose business seemed to be to listen to some new story, or to hear what people had to say upon a subject which came home to the understandings and the interests of all.

In my ignorant prejudice I had always imagined that a meeting of this kind must be an exhibition of unparalleled folly; but had such been really the case, I much question whether, on the occasion to which I allude, I should have been capable of perceiving it; for so deeply were my feelings absorbed by interests of an individual nature, that neither the crowd, nor the character of the people of whom it was composed, presented the slightest obstacle to the energy with which I forced my way into that part of the assembly where I perceived my father had placed himself, and from whence he looked up, with a smile which I could too well understand, to the more elevated seat occupied by many respectable people of the place, amongst whom were my brother and his amiable wife.

I thought her look was paler than usual that evening,

and I thought my brother's, too, was more than usually grave. It was a strange spectacle to behold him so situated; but if in that assembly there were few who could appreciate his motives, there was at least one by his side, whose soul was filled with sympathy for the struggle it must have cost him to make the effort which had brought him there. I have said that her look was paler than usual; yet I could see that her clear eyes were ever and anon directed to his face, as some argument or fact occurred to the speaker, which she regarded as bearing directly upon his case. Still it was a gentle unobtrusive look, and speedily withdrawn—a look which expressed not the convicting sentence of the prophet when he exclaimed—‘Thou art the man!’ but which addressed itself more tenderly to that union of interest, and fellowship of feeling, which those must ever recognise, who feel that their lot is cast together as immortal beings.

Hitherto my father had taken no part in the proceedings, though I watched him with suspicious eyes, fearing every moment that his threat would be put in execution. From these and other thoughts, however, my troubled spirit was at length beguiled, by the simple and touching eloquence of the speaker. I had never heard anything like it before. I had never heard a human being, called as he had been out of darkness and degradation, inviting his fellow-creatures to break the bondage of custom, and to free themselves from the slavery of a cruel tyrant, who could rule them no longer than they chose to be slaves. It was a new language to me, and I listened, as did many there, until I wondered how it was, that men should need inviting to what was so evidently rational and desirable in itself.

I listened, did I say? I had something more to do than listen; for now the speaker ceased, and my father had not opened his lips. I looked to the place where he stood. He had fallen back behind the crowd, and his hat was drawn over his eyes. Suddenly there was a movement amongst the departing assembly. A group was gathered around the spot where the speaker stood. Eager hands were stretched forth to grasp the pen which was offered for their signature. Some could scarcely guide it, to inscribe their names. Amongst these, however, there was one—was it a dream, or a reality? Did my brother really advance, and associate himself with that rude throng? Yes; with a stately and unhesitating step, with a calm and manly smile, he stretched forth his white hand amongst the rest. There was a whisper—a murmur—a shout—and my father looked on, and beheld it all! Instead of the laugh which might have been expected to burst from his lips, they were now pale and fixed as marble. I thought it was the stroke of death which had fallen upon him.

“Father,” I said, advancing to his side, “let us leave this place.”

“Not yet, child,” was his reply; and he shook from his arm the hold by which I would have supported his steps.

“Make way,” said the people who stood near him, and presently there was a silence in which I could have counted the palpitations of my own heart. My father, raising himself from the abject position in which he was accustomed to stand, with his head bent forward, and his eyes wandering on as if afraid to encounter any object with a fixed and steady gaze, now erect, decided, and composed—my poor father had advanced to where the

speaker still remained, surrounded by a group of persons anxious to prolong discourse upon a theme which was evidently near their hearts.

"Make way," said the people again, and now my father was amongst this group, and my brother and sister were stooping forward from their more elevated position, to see what he would do.

With my faint heart, all was fear and trembling agitation at that moment. I could scarcely believe the evidence of my senses; and when I had convinced myself beyond a doubt that that advancing form was indeed my father, I thought the terrible moment had surely come, when his voice would be raised to proclaim what he was accustomed to designate, 'the infamy and hypocrisy' of his son. It was evident that these or similar apprehensions pervaded other minds as well as my own, for expressive looks passed rapidly from one to another, and the deep silence which continued, denoted a generally prevailing apprehension of consequences not altogether to be desired.

"Do you see that?" said a neighbour of ours to her husband, who stood back for the purpose of allowing me room to behold what was going on. Involuntarily I pressed forward, and had placed myself close beside my father, before I discovered that the pen was in his hand, and that he was attempting to affix his name to the signature of my brother's.

I say attempting, for I scarcely know what passed after that blessed moment, only I remember that my father's tears were on the page, and that my arms were around his neck, when he turned to go away. Both however were silent—speechless—filled as it were with a new existence, and forgetful of the old; while amongst

that wondering throng no voice was raised to scoff, nor smile betokened doubt, but all seemed struck as if with one simultaneous conviction of the magnitude of the effort, and the importance of the act which had been done.

Never shall I forget the aspect of our humble home that night, nor how I sought the little attic chamber where I used to sleep, in order to pour out the language of my full heart, where alone its inmost feelings could be understood. Never shall I forget my father's quiet look, nor any other of the simple circumstances which marked that eventful time. It was not an occasion to be made a theme for conversation. My father and I both felt this; and when I came down from my own room, I took out my accustomed work, and sat beside him, so still, that we could count the ticking of the old clock, as it told for the first time how the moments glided on in happiness and peace to us.

If ever there was such a thing as rapture enjoyed on earth, it certainly was mine that night, only that I could not realize the whole, or dared not trust myself with the extent to which my ardent hopes might have led. I thought, too, what was more than probable, that my father's mood and temper on the morrow would be wholly changed; and therefore I determined the more carefully to watch his every look, and to study every turn of his peculiar character, in order that I might avoid all occasion of offence, and especially that of appearing to exult in the sacrifice he had made. All this, and other points of necessary observation, I had learned in that stern school of sad experience, in which it had been my lot to be taught; and I am the more careful to note them here, because it is to be feared that many well-intentioned persons hinder the good they gladly would

promote, by recognizing too promptly, and without sufficient caution and delicacy, the first appearance of a leaning towards better things.

The human heart is a strange mystery to those who have never given their attention to the study of its closely folded secrets. Even to those who have, it remains to be a mystery still; though it is one which, even in its partial development, repays the labour and the pains of study. The knowledge of the human heart—that neglected science, of which facts are the alphabet by which it is learned—how much does it reveal to us of what ought to be done and suffered, if we would work out any good purpose either as regards ourselves or others; and how culpable does it render those, who, having studied this science, neglect to render it conducive to the happiness of their fellow-creatures!

In none of the varied circumstances of life is this knowledge of the heart so important, as when we have to do with a mind diseased and perverted by the habitual indulgence of what is known to be wrong. For man to have ceased to justify his deeds unto himself, is said in the language of poetry to be the “last infirmity of evil.” The language of truth would rather describe it as an infirmity to which no man is subject until his mind has been awakened to conviction, and consequently not until he has advanced one step towards improvement. It is in this step of his experience most especially, that the utmost caution and delicacy is demanded from those around him, in order that from so critical a position he may neither be driven back, nor hindered if inclined to advance. Yet how often does it happen that a careless word, an ill-timed jest, or even a too earnest persuasion, will do this, when the very being who thus errs from

ignorance or folly, would have given up health and wealth, nay, even life itself, to have saved the beloved one. And, therefore, it is wise and good, that the study of the human heart in all its secret springs of feeling, and hidden windings of purpose and inclination, should be regarded as a science not unworthy the attention of rational, responsible, and immortal beings. Therefore it is just, and right, and necessary, that we should pursue this study by listening and observing, and adding facts to facts, so as to judge of the future by the present and the past. Thus by learning what human beings think and feel under certain circumstances, by seeing how they act and what are their motives for such action, we may be enabled to adapt ourselves to their peculiarities of thought and character, so as to assist materially in carrying forward what they undertake; and if we do nothing more, we may at least avoid that common error of the well-meaning and the weak—the hinderance of what is good.

But to return to my father. It was but natural to expect that a resolution so strange and so hastily formed as that of the preceding night, would be disregarded in the morning, or at least remembered only as an act of rashness and folly. So far from this, however, my father still kept to his purpose, though it was evident that the struggle it cost him to do so, was too great for words, and too painful to admit of sympathy. What then would I not have given for those powers of fascination which I never wished for before, and which under no other circumstances I could have wished for so much! What would I not have given to have been able to beguile him of the lengthened hours as they passed heavily along. It is not much to say that I did my best. Yet

having both the body and the mind to care for, that best was but little.

I asked my father to walk out with me, but he was unnerved, and painfully susceptible; and could not brook being pointed out as the man who had just signed the temperance pledge, but would not keep it for a day. I proposed to read to him, but his thoughts were in other things; and, therefore, I sat beside him, scarcely venturing to speak, when I would gladly have folded my arms around his neck, and poured into his ear the affectionate language of a soul overburdened with its sympathy, its gratitude, and its joy.

In this manner days passed on—such days of anxiety as those alone can know, who stand upon some dizzy height of happiness, attained with difficulty, and felt to be anything but secure. I have spoken of days only, but I might add that each returning night brought with it anxiety still more intense, for I could hear my father's step pacing his solitary chamber, as, unable to sleep, he tried to beguile himself of the restless weariness which took possession of his whole being. His irritability too was extreme. I could see it in his hurried and impatient movements, and I literally trembled to speak, lest I should utter some ill-chosen or unguarded word, which might strike some agitated nerve, and thus cast him back again into the gulf from which he had but just escaped.

And people who profess to think, and feel—ay, and to observe also—can pronounce it an easy thing for the habitual drunkard to stop of his own accord in his ruinous career. They can sometimes frown, and sometimes laugh, at his persisting in his folly, after he has seen

it to be such ; but as to doing anything to help to save him, that duty they regard as none of their's.

Could such individuals have witnessed the conflict of my poor father, they would never again have pronounced it an easy thing to give up that, which, destructive as it was, had supplied him with a kind of second nature—an artificial life, in which he existed, at least for a time, exempt from suffering, and from shame. They would have seen that each returning sun threw fresh light upon the hideous monster to which he had sacrificed health, property, good name, and peace, showing him more and more clearly the depth of the pit which still yawned beneath his feet. They would have seen too, could they have watched the inner workings of his agonized and almost phrenzied feelings, how, after the cessation of his accustomed stimulus, every nerve was left to thrill with tenfold sensibility to pain ; while the dread of observation, the sense of disgrace, and the upbraidings of a newly awakened conscience, increased to so frightful an excess as to threaten a return to the stimulating draught, as the only means of rendering existence and consciousness endurable.

With my brother the case was happily a very different one. His excesses had been comparatively recent, and more rare. His constitution was yet strong ; his respectability in the opinion of the world was scarcely shaken ; his property was uninjured ; and thus, while there was little for him to suffer, there was everything to gain. It was, therefore, not difficult for him to speak of what he had done ; for with him, when the experiment was once made, the trial was at an end. It is true, he had to meet the laughter and the ridicule of his associates, but he thought within himself—would not the same men

have laughed more had I gone on in the course I was pursuing? It is true that many of his friends, so called, dropped off, when they found him no longer the companion he had been; but he could afford to lose them, for they were the very same who would have been the first to leave him, had he fallen into poverty and disgrace.

“I now see,” my brother would often say, for he was able to converse freely on the subject, “that nothing could have been so well adapted to circumstances such as mine once were, as that pledge which so many persons ridicule, and so many regard as altogether useless. I can say with sincerity, and I hope with humility also, that I never really loved the vice to which I was addicted, and that I never reconciled myself to it as any other than a vice, loathsome and degrading in the sight both of God and man. To me it was as a monster into whose tyrant grasp I had unconsciously fallen, and from which I never should have escaped, had I continued to pursue the common practices of society. There is one who can bear witness to the truth of what I say, when I declare that often when I went forth to mix in the affairs of business, and to associate necessarily with men of the world, it was with the prayers of my wife still sounding in my ear, and the promise I had made her to be guarded and moderate still fresh upon my lips. I was not false or unfeeling in other things; I was not a man of weak resolves, or easily diverted from the end I had in view; and in this, if in any purpose of my life, I was sincere. What then was the rock on which my resolutions were so often wrecked? The opinions and habits of society — ‘the world’s dread laugh’ — the sneers I could not brook.”

“And how,” I asked on one occasion, “has the temperance pledge assisted you in this respect?”

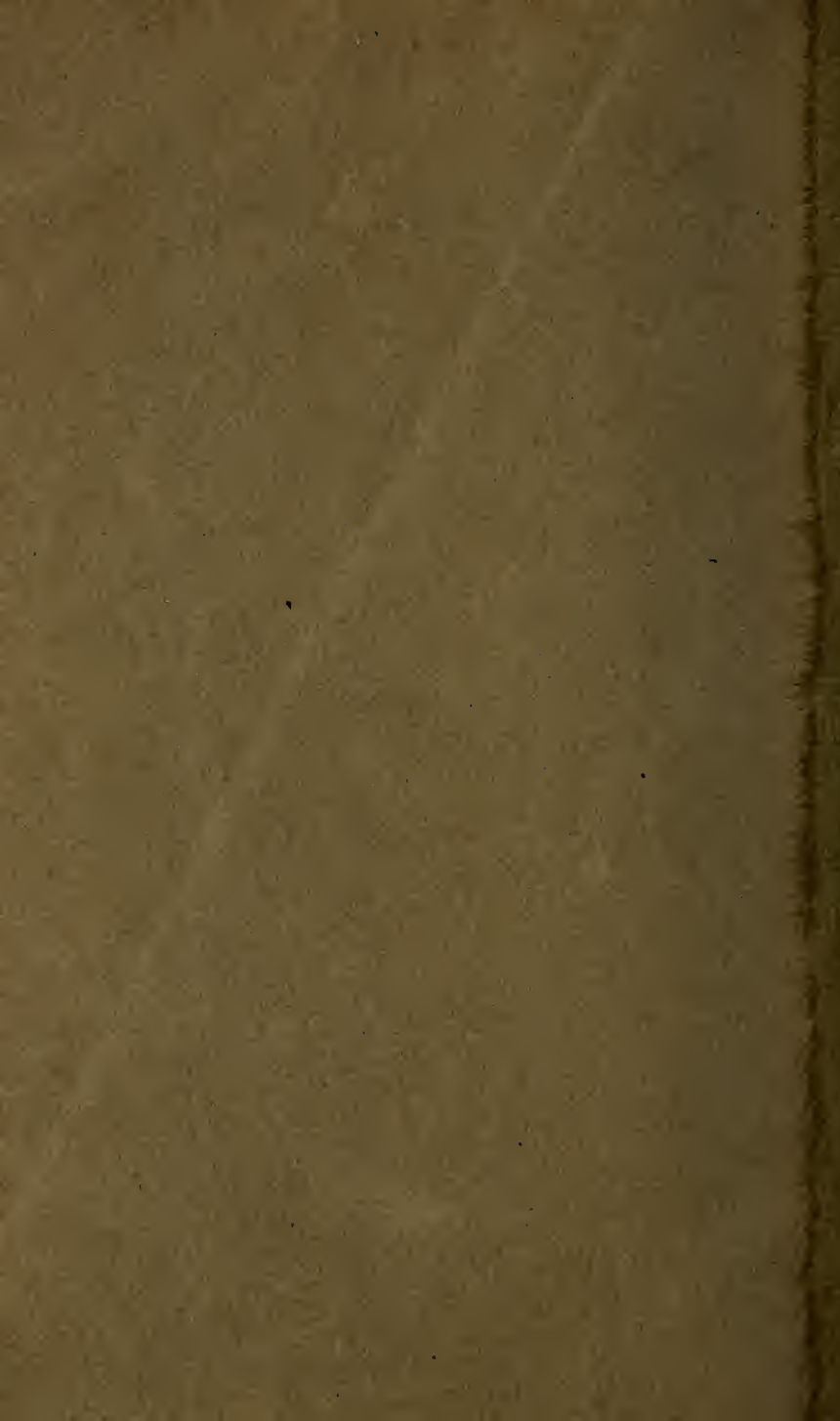
“It has placed me,” replied my brother, “on the safe side of a direct barrier. I will not deny that in the first instance considerable effort was required; but then it was an effort, which, when made, placed me at once in the position of a man who was master of himself, and as such, but little likely to be for any length of time a laughing-stock to others. I will, however, confess to you my weakness. I will tell you what you perhaps have never heard before, that although I knew both my property and my character to be at stake, so powerful with me was the opinion of the world, that I could not make the necessary effort until I learned that a merchant and fellow-townsmen, of equal standing with myself, had pledged himself to the same cause. Thus, then, we see the operation of that society. By the influence of example, and the countenance of numbers, we are supported in our opposition to the spirit of the world, which, in this instance, as in so many others, offers but a shadow in exchange for real good.”

Years have now passed over, and my poor father has struggled on, until abstinence has become his choice, rather than his punishment. My brother and he are both altered men. Life—character—home—everything is altered to them, and to me. The one is cheerful, active, prosperous, and benevolent; the other quiet, self-possessed, and apparently resigned to whatever may betide. Again we are as one family; again we can receive the countenance of society without a blush; again we can ask a blessing from Heaven upon our daily life.

In a beautiful cottage, situated at the outskirts of my brother's garden, my father and I now dwell in peace, and alone—save that our evening hours are often shared by the sweet sister, who renders to this once lost parent, all the respectful homage of an affectionate daughter. My brother, too, has peculiar satisfaction in watching over our daily-increasing happiness; while their children often climb the knees of the venerable old man, unconscious that he has ever been other than he now is—intelligent, humble, and devout.

Yes; I may venture to call my father devout, and I would fain hope, my brother too; for the past has taught them both a severe lesson; and when in reviewing the causes which have operated, under the Divine blessing, to bring about this happy change, we mention first the union of my sister with our family, we always conclude with that astonishing and unlooked-for effort of moral power and of self-denial on the part of my brother, which induced his once-infatuated parent to follow in the same path of safety and of hope.

THE END.





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